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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the discrepancies between educational researchers and practitioners, this book provides research-supported responses to specific questions generated by kindergarten through grade 12 teachers. The eight sections cover the following topics: (1) why communication skills are taught, (2) how communication skills are developed, (3) classroom concerns and considerations, (4) classroom activities in communication, (5) communication across the curriculum, (6) language diversity, (7) evaluating communication instruction and learning, and (8) the teacher and communication. Specific topics within each section are presented in a format consisting of a question posed by a practitioner, followed by relevant research, and references. The book concludes with an extensive list of references. (HTH)

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# Research Within Reach: Oral and Written Communication

## A Research-Guided Response to the Concerns of Educators

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## FOREWORD

### Researchers and Teachers: A Special Case in Communication

Teachers work in complex environments and face challenges on several fronts. Not only must teachers understand educational psychology, including motivation and learning theory, they must also be knowledgeable in the content areas that make up the particular curriculum they teach. In addition, teachers require training in the skills of pedagogy: how to plan and present lessons, how to assess progress of students, and how to meet the needs and strengths of the children they teach.

Of course, they do not face these formidable tasks unaided. Curriculum specialists, content supervisors, textbook publishers, and school administrators offer specific help as teachers chart the course of learning to be undertaken. Moreover a veritable army of researchers in universities, educational laboratories, research centers, and in schools themselves, study problems which affect teaching and learning. Unfortunately it is often the case that research findings have relatively little impact on the actual teaching and learning which occur in our schools.

At least two reasons may be advanced for this lack of research influence on teachers. First, the research community and the teaching community do not always communicate effectively. Not only do researchers tend to talk to other researchers while teachers talk to other teachers, but the languages used by these two groups are sufficiently different that translation is often required before teachers and researchers can understand one another.

Second, the work of the researcher is controlled in a way that is never true for the classroom teacher. Because the researcher is studying a particular phenomenon, he or she may interact with a very small number of children and may ignore behaviors which do not relate to the research question. Classroom teachers, on the other hand, must respond to all children in their classes in a wide variety of situations. Given these two different realities, then, it is often difficult to implement findings from the one in the other.

Recognizing these differences between teachers and researchers, the Research and Development Interpretation Service (RDIS) was established with funds from the National Institute of Education (NIE) of the Department of Education (DHEW, prior to 1980) to review and present research findings along with their classroom implications to teachers. Beginning with *Research Within Reach: Reading* in 1978, and *Research Within Reach: Elementary Mathematics* in 1979, the RDIS has de-

vised a multi-step process which has emphasized the needs of classroom teachers for current research-based knowledge. This process involves the following steps:

- *Solicit questions from teachers.* While these questions are collected in a variety of ways (telephone interviews, workshop activities, etc.), the important point is that the questions are posed by real teachers. They want the answers.
- *Present questions to consultant panel.* For each RDIS project, a consultant panel of experts in the field is convened. The panel's first task is to review the teachers' questions to decide whether or not a research-base exists which can be used in answering the question. Also, the panel prioritizes the questions so that the most important will be included in the interpretation reports.
- *Review the R&D literature.* Once the questions are selected, RDIS staff begin accumulating research reports, journal articles, and other documents. These are reviewed and form the base for the response. The articles are also abstracted and catalogued in annotated bibliographies which are ancillary products of each project.

  In the particular case of oral and written communication, we were surprised at how little research has been carried out. Donald Graves points out that for every $3000 spent on reading research, $1.00 is spent on research on writing. This lack of research was compensated for, to a degree, by the rich "craft" literature which abounds in both oral and written communication. Teachers and writers have produced an impressive array of theories, ideas, and suggestions for teaching communication. We used much of this craft literature in preparing this book.
- *Drafts of interpretive reports are prepared and reviewed.* The interpretive reports are prepared and include a review of the relevant research, a discussion of classroom implications and recommendations to teachers for classroom implementation of the research. The drafts are circulated to a variety of reviewers at schools, in educational laboratories which make up the nationwide R&D Exchange (RDx), to researchers in universities, and to the consultant panel.
- *Revisions based on the reviewers' reactions are prepared and the final report is printed and disseminated.* Revisions based on the reviews are undertaken and approved before the final product is printed. Regional Exchange (Rx) programs at the educational laboratories play a key role in the dissemination of the reports either through workshops or through state departments of education. Further, the professional associations (International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) have published and marketed the earlier reports on reading and mathematics to their memberships.

This report, *Research Within Reach: Oral and Written Communication*, has undergone the same process as did the other two publications with one significant difference. The Regional Exchanges have played an important role in development of this document. This involvement has resulted in a shared sense of ownership of the publication and has enabled RDIS staff to benefit from the expertise of individual staff members at the Regional Exchanges, many of whom have been teachers of oral and written communication and have conducted research in the area.

**Development of This Book**

In 1979, the directors of the Regional Exchange projects, located at the seven regional educational laboratories, asked RDIS to develop a major synthesis and interpretation of the research and craft-knowledge of writing and oral communication. To underline the importance of this task, the directors made commitments of staff effort to furthering this project.

Consequently in February 1980, representatives of each Regional Exchange and RDIS met at Southwest Regional Laboratory, the lab in Los Angeles, to participate in a two-day retreat, the two themes of which were the sharing of knowledge about oral and written communication and planning for the collaborative effort of which this book is the result.

While RDIS agreed to undertake the major work involved in the effort, the Exchanges agreed to help collect questions from teachers, to participate in reviews of the drafts, and to disseminate the book once it had been published.

**How Were Questions Generated?**

The first task of the Regional Exchanges was the collecting of practitioner questions. Because each Exchange works somewhat differently with the states they serve, the mechanism was left to individual Exchange preference. The approaches were various. One Exchange secured names of teachers in several states who were interveiwed by Exchange staff. The interviews provided important background on the individual and helped set questions into a context.

Another Exchange conducted a two-day workshop on research in oral and written communication. After each presentation or activity workshop participants were invited to record questions or comments in a journal which each person kept. Also in a workshop setting, one Exchange invited workshop participants to engage in a variety of synergistic activities which led to questions.

In all, over 300 questions were gathered from teachers, curriculum specialists, instructional supervisors, and other educators.

**How Were Questions Selected?**

Clearly, with that many questions, some had to be selected over others. The business of choosing which questions to answer was the focus of the first consultant panel meeting. Before the meeting, all the questions were typed, exactly as received. Then participants at the panel meeting reviewed the questions, sorting them by two criteria:

- Was the question of interest to several practitioners?
- Was the question answerable from a research or craft basis?

Once the questions were sorted by these criteria, the panel reviewed them again, placing them into categories. These categories were then examined and seventeen questions were selected because they appeared to be of primary importance to teachers, because they were answerable from the available research, and because, taken together, they provided a coherent picture of oral and written communication. Finally, participants at the panel meeting suggested research resources which RDIS staff would need to study before attempting to respond to the questions.

**Collecting the Research**

The RDIS staff spent a large part of 1980 and 1981 in collecting resource materials. These were read and reviewed with an eye toward responding to the questions. In addition, the books, journals, and micro-fiches were annotated and put into a bibliography, which became the first tangible result of the oral and written communication synthesis. The bibliography currently includes more than 400 items.

Once the resource collection began, RDIS staff prepared draft summaries of responses which were circulated to the consultant panel, Regional Exchange and Regional Laboratory staffs and other educators. This initial attempt at sketching an answer provided a focus for reviewers' comments which subsequently resulted in the first draft of the present book.

**The Writing Team**

In November 1981 the writing team met for the first time. An important outcome of the team's discussion was the idea that--wherever appropriate--the questions should be answered in terms of both oral and written communication, rather than creating two "books within a book." The writers felt that this decision was justified for three reasons.

- Many statements about oral communication are true for writing and *vice versa;* moreover, the two modes are interrelated.
- Communication--whether oral or written--needed to remain at the center of the book.
- Oral communication has received less attention than has written communication and the team wanted to ensure that both were given equal weight.

Once this major decision was taken, the writing team divided up the questions and began preparing draft responses. These drafts reflected two other decisions which the team made.

- Wherever possible, the drafts would reflect the needs of teachers of students whose native language or dialect is not Standard English.
- Classroom implications of the research would take precedence over specific classroom activities.

**The Writing Process at Work**

During the five days of that first team meeting, the writers remarked frequently about how their work was paralleling the research. During the first morning, for example, the four writers talked about each of the questions, citing research and mentioning ideas for each response. Then several different organizational patterns were discussed for the book as a whole. This was clearly a series of prewriting activities.

After that first morning, the writers divided up the questions and spent the afternoon working individually. Gradually, late in the day, people began sharing drafts. One after another, each draft was read by its author, while the other team members listened. Then all four discussed the response, noticing both strengths and weaknesses of the draft. It should be mentioned that for each of us this initial reading was filled with anxiety. The support of the peer-revising group helped each

of us feel that the afternoon had been well spent. During the months that followed this initial drafting session, extensive revisions were made, often at the suggestion of members of the consultant panel, sometimes from others on the writing team or from other reviewers. Finally, an editor was engaged to read each draft and offer suggestions for formatting and improvement.

**How the Answers Are Constructed**

Each chapter begins with a question posed by a practitioner. The relevant research is then described. Numbers in parentheses in the text refer the reader to the "References" at the end of each chapter. The classroom implications of that research are provided in each chapter. Each response ends with a summary which highlights the key issues.

After the text in each chapter, the reader will find a numbered list of references which were used in the text.* In addition to appearing after each chapter, all of the references have been brought together in a master bibliography at the end of the book, where they are presented in alphabetical order, by author, without numbers.

The book is divided into eight sections. Sections 1 and 2 concern the "why" and "how" of communication. Classroom activities are at the heart of Sections 3, 4, 5, and 6. The focus of Section 7 is on evaluation. Finally, Section 8 describes ways in which teachers can foster effective communication. While the chapters taken together present a coherent, unified view of research and practice in oral and written communication, the chapters are written in such a way that they can "stand alone," so the reader may read the chapters in whatever order seems best to him or her.

*Those references which are preceded by an asterisk (*) are considered to be of special importance for teachers.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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*Regional Exchange staff who headed the effort at each laboratory.

We would be remiss if we did not mention and publicly thank the RDIS staff for their support: Emily Thach, Research Associate; Karen Temmen, Research Assistant; Mary Anne Isaacs, Abstractor-Indexer; Sandra Ruder, and Sheila Walker, Secretaries. Also, Linda McKern, Marlene Dandridge, and Carol Laupp, our colleagues at CEMREL, helped prepare the final manuscript and deserve our thanks.

Finally we wish to thank those educators who posed the questions which lie at the heart of our effort. This book is returned to them, and to their colleagues, in the hope that the questions have been answered and that these answers will lead to improved oral and written communication in classrooms.

## *WHY COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE TAUGHT*

***The classroom is an extremely busy place. Not only must teachers present lessons on a wide range of subjects, but they must also ensure that each child has the opportunity to learn. Given this already heavy responsibility, why should teachers instruct their students in oral and written communication?***

## *Why should I have students write?*

Not too long ago a group of teachers was asked the question "Why do people write?" There was a long pause, and the question was rephrased: "What do you write?" With this, a few tentative responses began with "I write letters," "I make lists for grocery shopping and things to do," and "I keep a diary." These triggered further examples: writing thank-you notes, invitations, messages, records, reports, filling out various necessary forms, logs, journals and, for pleasure--writing prose and poetry. When asked "Why do you write in your capacity as teachers?" the responses came quickly: "to produce lesson plans," "reports for the principal," "making out tests and experience charts."

These writing tasks answered a number of needs or purposes. Some writing tasks are undertaken for pleasure; some to communicate information. Some of the writing activities served as memory-jogs or ways of organizing apparently unrelated information into a coherent whole. There are, indeed, many reasons to write--and to teach writing--in and out of the classroom.

### A Means to Expand Learning

Many have said that we learn to write by writing. Students who write see more readily the need for the improvement of skill in handwriting, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Lack of proficiency in these skills creates problems for young writers who must solve them if they are to achieve their goals. A positive effect on the level of skills can result.

Graves has indicated that writing contributes to intelligence since, as a highly complex act, it demands a high level of thought (9).

Writing requires the writer to call upon memory and fact, organize thoughts into some logical sequence, bring to bear upon the task all available knowledge of letters, sentence structure, grammar, and form in order to communicate. But, apart from this technical knowledge, a sense of audience is needed for the writer to select the appropriate style and language to achieve the desired goal.

If used effectively, writing can be a tool for thinking. The process of structuring a paper itself takes the students through several different levels of cognition. The brainstorming, evaluation, and selection of ideas, the formulation of hypotheses and gathering of information to support the hypotheses, and the refining of ideas all serve to develop a student's ability to think logically and critically.

Birnbaum states, in her study of reading and writing behavior, "We learn to

use written language because it enlarges our capacity to shape our experiences into meaning, to represent meaning to ourselves and others, and to represent ourselves to others in our environment" (2).

Moffett lists thinking as number one in his summary of principles for a student-centered language arts curriculum: "Most profoundly considered, a course of language learning is a course in thinking. A writing assignment, for example, is a thinking assignment. Conceiving and verbalizing must be taken together" (13).

Insight and discovery are encouraged, says Haley-James, when children become involved in and yet in a sense are detached from experiences that they record on paper: "Through seeing personal ideas and experiences appear on paper, redrafting what is written to make it more accurate or complete, and receiving reader feedback on what has been written, a writer expands what is learned from the original experience" (10).

**Relationship to Skills in Other Curriculum Areas**

As one of several tools of communication, writing reinforces and is in turn reinforced by oral language, listening, and reading. The prewriting stage in the process of writing entails extensive use of oral language, listening, and, frequently, reading. By using language skills both to receive ideas and information from others and to express their own, children will see the close relationship between reading, writing, listening, and speaking in their receptive/expressive roles. An understanding of the worth of language skill can in turn strengthen children's facility with reading, listening, discussing, and writing in other curriculum areas.

Helping young people *respond* to literature in both oral and written language will provide a motivation for further discussion and writing as well as helping children to think through their understanding of the meaning of literature. Children will see a variety of styles of writing and can try out these new patterns in their own writings. Reading and listening to words in context increases children's ability to use vocabulary more precisely in their own writing and speaking. Children who are provided time and opportunity to read and discuss stories will achieve a greater sense of story that they can draw upon when recording their own experiences or creating fiction (1, 4).

Interrelationships among the language skills should not be confined to the language classes alone nor should the mastery of these skills become more important than the meaningful *uses* of the skills. Writing can be the medium through which students explore and come to understand difficult concepts. Student writing, for example, should be assigned with clear purposes established in content areas across the curriculum, because writing for a genuine purpose is more likely to result in honest communication. As King suggests, "Children will learn to write and continue to write when they discover that it does something for them. They need to find that writing is a natural, meaningful part of classroom living and learning, that attention of the class and teacher is on what is said, and that written language is valued for its contribution to both the learning underway and the learner" (11).

**The Need to Communicate**

Experts in the field discussing the uses and advantages of writing as a medium usually identify it as a practical means of conveying various types of information and personal messages to those not present. Because the pragmatic function of writing has been the major thrust of instruction for many years, most adults would agree with this perception. However, children growing up with the electronic media of today may view writing quite differently from their parents. Nevertheless, despite the reliance on television and other non-print media children recognize that most personal messages and information still require print when the recipients of their messages are not present and cannot be reached orally. Children who have experiences with print as they grow up seem to turn eagerly to writing as a means of expression.

Britton speaks of the importance of intentions and of the need to encourage children to pin down memorable words and to write stories (3). He discusses the use of writing to develop relationships in the classroom and encourages journal writing so that teacher and student can develop a dialogue in a mode other than speech. The student "talks" to the teacher by entries in the journal, including ideas for stories to share. The teacher responds with a brief note in the journal and returns it to the student. This exchange opens the door for new writing experiences.

We all feel the urge to express our feelings and to share information with others. Children need to be able to write so they, too, can use this means to share with others ideas and information that are important. This ability to express himself or herself adequately and satisfactorily can do much to improve the child's concept of self-worth.

In a recent article, Smith has opposed the view, however, that writing for communication is its only or major value. He suggests that the writer is always the first reader and may often be the only one when recording in diaries, journals, and taking notes. He believes that the writer, not the act of writing itself, is the focal point and thus that creating experiences and exploring ideas are perhaps the major functions of writing (14).

**A Satisfying Experience**

Experiences that children enjoy are often imitations of adult behavior. We find very young children playing house and playing school. In fact, most nursery school and kindergarten children spend a portion of their day in the playhouse section of their classroom using language and behavior which they believe to be adult. In playing school, the "student" recites, reads, and writes in imitation of older students he has seen. Children who see their parents reading and writing desire these experiences more than do children in families in which adults do not read. Many parents, siblings, and grandparents encourage children in their early writing experiences--scribbles and pictures that are undecipherable, but whose intent is clear--just as they encouraged the infant's first attempts to communicate orally. The pleasure derived by the child from this encouragement pushes him or her to renewed attempts at communication and further explorations of the world of language. A common sight in homes of young children is the picture or story

fastened with a magnet to the refrigerator door. This shows the child that communication is valued.

Durkin's studies verified that encouragement, responding to questions asked, conversations with parents and siblings, and shared experiences were at least partially responsible for development of early reading skill in children (8). Clay presents children's early scribbles as their attempt to represent meaning. Gradual changes in their "messages" more and more closely approximate letters and words (6). Britton talks of the "pretend writing" of children and their desire to produce books that convey their "stories" (3). Just as children draw, paint, use crayons, count, or say the alphabet both for their own pleasure and to receive a positive response from an adult, so do children produce scribbles that represent their name, stories, and messages that to them have meaning.

Callitri, in providing a structure for teaching the language arts, has suggested that the first stage is one he calls "autistic" at which the desire is to produce or use language only for self, not for others. He recommends that teachers involve students in self-awareness experiences. An awareness of their own perceptions and experiences in focusing attention, especially on the many sensory experiences, lead children to become aware of their own feelings. No requests for reporting their feelings or thoughts are made or desired at this stage of development. Children are simply learning to enjoy a variety of experiences in listening, looking at pictures, touching, smelling, producing sounds, and writing that may later be drawn upon when a desire to communicate occurs (5). Thus, children are, in a sense, discovering the world about them in ways that will enable them to better understand their role in that world. They must know themselves before they can write about the world beyond their personal lives and perceptions.

Children who have opportunities to "play with words" may later find that these experiences with the sound, rhyme patterns, structure, and multiple meanings of words produce pleasures that transfer to oral and written form when they wish to convey their messages to others. Chanting in repetitive phrases of a story being read aloud or trying out voice variations in choral speaking are enjoyable experiences. Exploring the multiple meanings of words by drawing cartoons emphasizes and reinforces their appropriate use. Writing parodies of Mother Goose rhymes calls for an understanding of rhyme as well as meaning.

The Committee on Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs of the National Council of Teachers of English concludes that writing serves both public and personal needs of students, and it warrants the full, generous, and continuing effort of all teachers (7).

**A Release from Tension**

In this age when so much is written about stress generated in various occupations and in our very life-styles, a valid experience for young people is learning to deal with emotions and feelings. Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, hundreds of poems were published that disclosed the depth of feelings and distress felt by old and young alike. Using language, both oral and written, has provided release for centuries in song, speech, and writing. The personal reflections that are afforded in producing prose and poetry, the exploration of fears by

young children through writing ghost stories, even the fantasies that envelop hidden values and strong messages about the human experience are all means of releasing, without always directly revealing, the deep-seated concerns that stimulate the writer. Anonymous letters, stories and verse, parodies of nursery rhymes, and even graffiti reveal this very personal need to release inner tensions in somewhat safe and certainly more subtle ways than shouting in anger or writing signed letters to express displeasure, unhappiness, or vulnerability.

This psychological value of writing has long been documented and, as Haley-James states, "(such writings) have stressed the tension release and escape value of getting feelings on paper and of reflecting through writing on troublesome, victorious or otherwise personal experiences" (10). Finally, Mallett and Newsome confirm that "writing offers a means of thinking through by oneself the complications of and justification for a point of view, the subtleties and intricacies of states of feeling" (12).

The classroom teacher who views what students write as important and who sees the conventions of writing as secondary will be encouraging students not only to use writing but will be showing students that what they have to say is valued. When attempts at written communication are met with positive responses, students will be motivated to expand their writing experiences. Teachers who establish time and places for writing of all types to occur and who develop opportunities for varieties of writing experiences will be providing many students with just the incentive they need to try their hand at this medium.

Arranging for pen pals will encourage correspondence, and organizing a classroom newspaper will provide a reason for many kinds of writing and editing to take place. Experiences outside the school can provide content for stories and poems that can in turn be published in some form by the school or class. The whole process of writing, from prewriting to publishing, can be an enjoyable experience when students write and publish their own books for shelving in the classroom or school library. Young Authors Programs frequently are an incentive for submitting poems and stories. Visits from published authors to schools establish the reality of writing as a profession. The encouraging, exciting climate created by the teacher and the school will play a significant role and be profoundly persuasive evidence of the value of writing for students in our schools.

**Summary**

Writing, then, meets a number of goals, some directly related to school; others related to the larger context of the students' lives. Writing is a means to expand learning. Writing helps students to externalize the information which they are learning and provides opportunities for students to explore relationships among several diverse ideas.

Writing reinforces skill in reading and other areas of the curriculum. Additionally, other areas of the curriculum offer opportunities for writing, often in specialized formats.

Children also find writing to be pleasurable and psychologically satisfying. When attention is paid to the communicative intent of children's writing rather than just to surface features and mechanical errors, the young writer comes to re-

alize the value assigned to his or her attempts to communicate. This not only provides reinforcement for the child's self-concept but it also encourages development of communicative skill.

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***What are the benefits to my students of instruction in oral communication?***

Like thinking, speaking and listening lie at the core of what it means to be a human being, to be a member of a community that shares knowledge, reflects on experience, speculates about the unknown, and forms intangible bonds of emotion as strong as any primitive instincts for physical survival. Children engage in thought independent of the direct effects of schooling, but it would never occur to us to question whether we should deliberately promote thinking in our classrooms. We know that it is our job to help students think in a focused manner, in a more sustained fashion, and in more varied and creative ways than they would without the benefits of our teaching. So it is with oral communication. Speaking and listening skills likewise need to be systematically nurtured if our students are to enjoy the full range of communication competence which is potentially available to them.

Britton (3) reminds us that students need to practice communication as a doctor practices medicine, as attorneys practice law, rather than as jugglers practice new tricks before a performance. The oral communication activities in which we ask our students to participate ought to invite learners to use speaking and listening in coming to grips with authentic, substantive tasks or problems. Many educators harbor an impression of oral communication activities as contrived, often amusing games like "Guess What I'm Describing," or may recall a series of painfully artificial and stilted oral reports entitled, "The Natural Resources of Africa."

Examples of meaningful oral communication activities include lessons which use discussion to discover the physical properties of substances in a science class (22), exercises which provide students with an imaginative outlet for exploring their changing emotions and values through creative dramatics, and sessions which encourage learners to think about the results of their classmates' thinking by listening to and discussing prepared talks about matters of shared concern. Through these and similar activities students practice communication skills and thereby develop the kind of fluency, effectiveness, and breadth of expression and reception that would be denied them were they left to their own resources.

With this brief perspective on how classroom oral activities can shape a set of developing skills, let us turn now to research and theory which put a more critical eye than usual on speaking and listening. Oral communication, it is clear, pervades all aspects of our lives. Listening, in particular, consumes a larger chunk

of our waking hours than any other conscious activity (12). Even formal public speaking--presenting non-spontaneous talks to non-intimate groups--is a surprisingly common experience for people from all socioeconomic strata (17).

**Oral Communication in the Classroom**

The value of effective oral communication is nowhere more evident than in the classroom. Success in school hinges on listening and speaking skills as much as on intellectual ability. Speech is the primary medium of instruction. Teachers transmit knowledge orally, and also regulate classroom activity by means of speech communication. Procedural instructions, rewards, punishments, instructional feedback--all are delivered orally. The student with deficient listening skills is academically disabled. Teachers, of course, evaluate student achievement on a continuous basis by questioning students about subject matter. Students' communication styles, extraneous as these may be to actual subject matter knowledge, along with their willingness to communicate, substantially color teachers' evaluations of student achievement (24).

Some researchers suggest a causal relationship between students' speech styles and student achievement. Certain speech styles appear to trigger stereotyped negative reactions in teachers. As a result, teachers *expect* some students to be poorer learners than others who speak in more acceptable styles. The teachers' expectations become self-fulfilling. That is, because the teachers project their expectations in sometimes very subtle and unconscious ways, the students do achieve at a depressed level (30).

Beyond the issue of teachers' perceptions or expectations of student achievement, students' skill at expressing their instructional needs certainly affects their progress. Students who can ask helpful questions or who can request assistance achieve learning objectives at a faster pace than their less communicatively competent classmates (27). Indeed, reticent children earn lower grades in school and also obtain lower SAT scores, despite the fact that these students are no less intelligent than their more talkative peers (14).

In addition, many student-centered teaching methods presume that students have mastered the communication skills needed to engage in interactive activities. For example, small and large group discussions are useful ways of organizing students in any subject matter class for purposes of inquiry or problem solving. Peer tutoring and peer evaluation are effective learning situations for all students involved and have the added payoff of freeing teachers to devote individualized attention to those who need it. If student interaction skills are poorly-developed, teachers often find themselves adrift in chaos rather than at the helm of a collaborative learning environment.

Speaking and listening, then, are central to the organization and operation of classrooms. Students who possess limited oral communication skills suffer limited academic success both because we expect them to do poorly and also because they have restricted access to the learning resources of the classroom. Of course, oral skills are critical also because they provide the foundation for acquiring the related language arts of writing and reading (21).

Of even more profound consequence to learning, however, is the close rela-

tionship between verbalization and knowledge acquisition. Preschool children often engage in noncommunicative talk, speaking in ways which make little contact with the behaviors of others who may be within earshot. The bulk of research studies now support the view that such "private speech" is externalized thought (18). As children mature, they learn to suppress these vocalizations and engage instead in "inner speech." But even adults revert to muttering to themselves when confronted with intellectually taxing problems. Concepts are closely linked, if not equivalent, to verbal labels (6). Similarly, the syntax of language enables us to join and transform concepts (4). Numerous studies have pointed out that verbalization--oral performance--can reinforce learning about concepts and their relations (11). Oral interaction in the classroom, therefore, is not merely a vehicle for assessing what students know but is a fundamental tool which allows students to discover and consolidate new knowledge (22, 28). In short, speaking and listening in school settings permit intellectual activity.

**Oral Communication in Life Roles**

Speech communication proficiency promotes pragmatic goals outside of the classroom as well. In a number of respects, vocational success depends on workers' speaking and listening abilities. Regardless of how well students train for their chosen vocations, inadequate communication skills can hinder their very entry into the job market. Job interviewers are strongly affected by applicants' nonverbal and verbal communication styles. In fact, personnel officers may distinguish between management trainees and custodial workers to a substantial degree on the basis of candidates' oral communication (10). Employers, even in technical fields which call for little contact with consumers, often prize interpersonal communication skills as highly as any other job-related aptitude.

In complex organizations especially, jobs which carry high status and high pay demand proficiency in oral communication. Individuals who are anxious about their communication skills are likely to select themselves out of career opportunities for which they may be otherwise qualified. Moreover, as our society turns increasingly to a service and information-oriented economy, communication tasks comprise the entirety of many workers' job requirements. In virtually all occupations, moreover, job satisfaction is related to employees' ability to interact with and influence decision makers.

An additional pragmatic motivation for working with students' oral communication skills pertains to participation in the role of citizen. From its origins in classical Greece, speech education has been regarded as making a vital contribution to sustaining democracy. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution codifies that cherished principle in our society. With the increasing intrusion of electronic media into the political process, evaluative listening skills take on added importance as a foundation for citizenship. Recent history also illustrates the power of a vocal citizenry in affecting community affairs through face-to-face lobbying and through expression at public hearings and meetings of local governing bodies.

Communication skills even affect the quality of health care services which consumers obtain. Studies of doctor-patient communication indicate that the

abysmally low rate of patient compliance with medical orders is increased when doctors and patients share information more freely (19). Patients often obtain such information only by assertively questioning their physicians or by seeking the aid of intermediate-level health care providers like nurses and technicians.

Somewhat less tangible consequences of communication competence pertain to the role of speaking and listening in promoting children's (and adults') psychological well-being and social adjustment. Communication provides the mirror by which we come to know ourselves. It is necessary for the formation of self-concept. Strong communication skills facilitate an accurate and positive sense of self. Peer acceptance contributes to feelings of self-worth, especially during adolescence. Children with dysfunctional communication patterns, however, are not likely to form satisfying peer relationships.

The impact of oral communication effectiveness extends beyond peer interaction into home and family. Parent-child bonds are initially forged through nonverbal communication (29). Later, parents teach children acceptable forms of behavior through the medium of speech. In fact, the type of speech which parents use to discipline and regulate children constrains the range of communication styles which those children ultimately will have at their command throughout their adult lives (9). Sibling relations are also largely negotiated through oral strategies. Finally, the very survival and cohesiveness of family units depend upon family members' ability to express their needs and feelings to each other in constructive ways.

**The Status of Instruction in Oral Communication**

Oral communication, then, is central to individual development, to learning, and to essential life roles. It is curious, therefore, that direct instruction in oral communication is so seldom undertaken in schools. Our situation today, however, stands in sharp contrast to the educational systems of the classical ages in which oral communication--the study of rhetoric--was the most advanced goal toward which students progressed. Modern British education also accords great importance to "oracy" (5). But in American schools, speaking and listening are most often regarded as less important objectives when compared to the "three Rs." Though some elementary curriculum guides include isolated suggestions that students present oral book reports or practice making introductions, few provide well-articulated *programs* of study in this skill area. In most secondary schools, if speech classes are offered at all, they are offered as fine arts electives for advanced students or as English electives for basic students (2). There are, however, significant exceptions to these generalizations. Some school staffs committed to the value of oral communication education have created and implemented exemplary curricula in speaking and listening. Also, recent federal and state policies which define speaking and listening as basic skills have spawned a great many new programs and materials (1).

Children learn to speak and to listen without the benefits of school-based instruction. It is obviously true that children engage in oral communication and may possess considerable prowess before ever coming to school. What students may lack however, are communication behaviors which are *flexible* and which are *ef-*

*fective*. In practice, students learn to communicate holistically, everything all at once. For purposes of highlighting key learning objectives, however, we will examine those two aspects of communication competence in turn.

**Oral Activities for Flexible Communication**

Some students may function well in familiar contexts. Competent communicators, however, possess rich repertoires of communication acts and strategies from which they can select the ones most effective for a given situation (32). Competent communicators learn to adapt to different listeners (high authority, low authority, intimate, psychologically distant), to different purposes (storytelling, persuading, reporting, self-disclosing), to different settings (home, church, playground, business office, service station, classroom), to different topics (baseball, current events, illness, love, atomic physics, literature), and to different types or genres of discourse (an answer to a question, an extended talk, small talk, concluding a conversation) (7, 31).

In order to adapt to these various aspects of communication situations, speakers need first of all to have a variety of styles at their command: intimate, casual, consultative, formal, and frozen styles, for example (15). Most will not acquire this kind of broad communicative repertoire if left to haphazard circumstance. Some, for example, will be limited to career opportunities within their own communities because their casual speech does not include a style appropriate for formal situations in the broader commercial community. Some students will be misdiagnosed and mistreated in medical facilities because their repertoires lack behaviors appropriate to health care interviews. Some students will be unwitting victims of advertising claims or of propaganda campaigns because they do not distinguish statements of fact from statements of opinion.

In addition to an extensive repertoire of communication acts, competent communicators need to develop sensitivity so that they can draw appropriately from their stock of speech behaviors. Young children may exhibit considerable egocentrism which limits their ability to judge the needs of listeners (20). Some children display antisocial behaviors simply because they are insensitive to how others will react (8). Even older speakers sometimes lack sensitivity to situations and, as a result, may give a long-winded answer when a short one may suffice or adopt a light-hearted style when a more grave tone would be appropriate. Classroom experiences in oral communication, experiences which are deliberately and systematically constructed, can promote sensitivity to communication contexts.

**Oral Activities for Effective Communication**

Flexibility is necessary for effective communication but it is not sufficient. In order to become effective communicators, students must learn how to implement their communication acts. They must learn to speak intelligibly and to control their volume. They must be able to call up examples and illustrations as these are needed during the course of a conversation. They must be able to organize a talk--provide some background, relate various points to each other and to the overall topic at hand, create closure. They must learn to listen for comprehension, for retention, and to discern a speaker's point of view. Learning to implement

communication is primarily a matter of practicing speaking and listening in various contexts.

In addition, students need feedback concerning the effectiveness of their speaking or listening behaviors. Feedback enables students to evaluate how they might need to change some strategies and behaviors or to gauge which strategies and behaviors will serve them well. The most useful feedback is rooted in the communication context, which derives from the nature of the audience and the purpose. If for example, a speaker is asked to describe the layout of his or her bedroom, useful feedback would call upon classmates to draw their visualizations of the described room. In this way, the speaker can compare the audience's understanding of the message with the intended meaning.

In short, if students are to learn more than just speaking and listening, if they are to learn the skills of *flexible* and *effective* speaking and listening, we must deliberately and systematically engage students in oral activities which promote rich repertoires of communication acts, sensitize students to accurately recognize features of communication contexts, provide opportunities for trying out communication behaviors, and supply feedback with which students may evaluate their communicative effectiveness.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that regardless of the subject matter lesson, a "hidden curriculum" in speaking and listening leaves its mark on students. From the modeling of teachers and other school officials, students learn what counts as acceptable adult speech. They learn this adult standard even when these models diverge considerably from the ideals which may appear in textbooks.

One of the student's primary tasks upon entering public school is to learn the nature of "teacher talk." Students who function successfully in school come to understand, for example, that teachers' questions (e.g., "How many pennies make a dime?") are not to be interpreted as requests for information. Rather, such quasi-questions are demands for performance, and their function is to allow teachers to evaluate student achievement on a continuing and informal basis (13). In learning the norms of teacher talk, students learn how to cope with a communication style typical of institutional settings. In most classrooms, students also learn how to take turns and to withhold their spontaneous comments when another is speaking, how to produce comments relevant to a subject not of their choosing, and (perhaps) how to attend to an extended discussion. Students also may acquire their teachers' attitudes toward communication: primary grade children often display a marked rise in apprehension about communication, and an unusually large proportion of teachers in these grade levels are themselves apprehensive about speech (23).

There is one additional benefit of involving students in oral activities, a benefit which is alluded to throughout this book. Oral communication skills support learning in other knowledge/skill domains. Speaking and listening provide foundations upon which other skills are built. For example, there is some evidence of improved reading ability as a result of instruction in listening skills (21). The ability to sustain uninterrupted talk may necessarily precede the ability to compose connected prose (26). Sensitivity to audiences which is first acquired through spoken interaction appears to be critical for good writing (16).

In addition, oral communication activities enable teachers to use methods of classroom instruction which are consistent with the goals of interactive, student-centered learning. Oral communication activities create a comfortable, accepting classroom climate. Oral communication activities allow students to teach and to learn from each other. Oral communication activities instill a spirit of problem solving by providing opportunities for student collaboration. Thus, the benefits of oral activities extend beyond acquisition of essential speaking and listening skills. They can help to create a positive learning environment.

**Summary**

Oral communication classroom activities can be systematic and purposeful. They cultivate abilities which are crucial for success in school and are intimately linked to intellectual functioning. Job entry, success, and satisfaction also depend upon effective speaking and listening. Citizen participation in our democratic form of government demands speaking and listening proficiency. In addition, student self-concept and social adjustment are contingent upon these skills. While students do learn to speak and to listen without direct teacher intervention, systematic oral communication instruction is necessary to foster flexible and effective communication. Without the benefits of oral activities in the classroom, students will not develop rich repertoires of communication acts from which they may draw in diverse and unfamiliar communication situations. They will be limited in their sensitivity to the nature of those communication contexts as well. Practice in a variety of forms of speaking and listening improves communication effectiveness. Well-designed feedback enables students to evaluate and adjust their communication in order to further enhance their skills. Moreover, teachers in all subject areas do teach students about oral communication, sometimes unintentionally and sometimes with undesirable results. Finally, oral communication activities support learning in other knowledge/skill domains. They do so by providing the foundation upon which other skills rest, and by enabling interactive, student-centered instructional techniques.

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## *HOW COMMUNICATION SKILL IS DEVELOPED*

***Teaching is more than knowing the subject matter. Teachers also need to understand principles of educational psychology, of pedagogy, and of child development. In this section, information about the development of oral and written communication competence in children is presented.***

***How do infants acquire oral language? What are the implications of research on oral language development for classroom teachers of young children?***

We should all be surprised and fascinated to learn of a five-year-old child who mysteriously displayed an uncanny ability to solve problems in advanced calculus. No doubt we would see banner headlines in the newspaper: "BABY WHIZ BAFFLES EXPERTS, SAYS GRAD SCHOOL MATH 'JUST KID STUFF'." We would see the child, legs dangling from adult-sized over-stuffed chairs, interviewed on every late night television talk show. We would be both amazed and humbled by the youngster's remarkable achievement.

Though unheralded by headlines or talk show appearances, all children who cross a public school threshold have achieved a feat of even greater magnitude. They have previously learned their native language. After all, the entirety of advanced calculus can be contained within a single textbook, but no single volume, not a shelf of scholarly treatises, can adequately capture all that each and every kindergarten child knows about language. Our respect and admiration for the talents of young language learners have profound implications for how we might conduct our classrooms.

Research in language acquisition and development is multifaceted. The questions which different researchers consider to be important vary with the differing theoretical orientations that inspire child language studies. The research literature does not yield a neat list of age-normed competencies, nor a precise sequence of instruction that we might follow in a lock-step fashion. Nevertheless, we can distill from this fertile and exciting field of inquiry some general propositions about how children come to know language. These broad principles can sensitize us to our students' accomplishments in the realm of language so that we might build upon them, even celebrate them, as we come to appreciate just how remarkable these achievements are.

**Language Learning: Creative, not Imitative**

The sentences you have just read have never been written before, and yet you were able to comprehend them, puzzle over them, agree or disagree with them. When children learn language, they are not simply memorizing dictionary entries for specific words or sentences they have heard. Rather, they are acquiring a system for actively composing or extracting meaning from a theoretically boundless

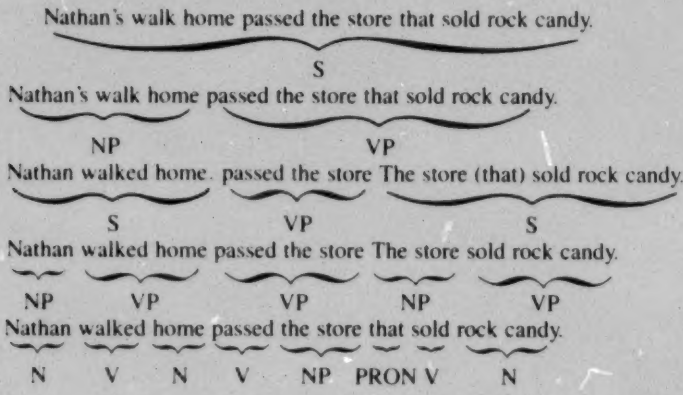
reservoir of language. This creative aspect of language learning is the most fundamental fact for which theories of language acquisition must account.

There are numerous ways of combining and embedding sentences. We cannot even say that there is any longest English sentence, because no matter how long a sentence is, another clause always can be tacked on:

> *Jacky appeared to be hard at work on the reading worksheet which she had been trying to avoid all morning by offering to clean the chalkboard, sharpening and resharpening her pencils, and arranging and rearranging her papers, but really she was in her mind's eye skipping through the edge of the surf and watching the foam bubbles burst in the sunlight and feeling the wind which was blowing her bandanna that just last week she had found near the ...*

We find such sentences unacceptable, it is true. They are hard to understand because they tax the limits of our memory. We seldom would produce such sentences because they are awkward and unwieldly. Nevertheless, we are capable of understanding them though we surely have never encountered them before.

In describing what it is that speakers know which enables them to utter and comprehend novel sentences, linguists find it helpful to introduce the concept of rules. The linguistic rules to which they refer are not prescriptive regulations about how one ought to use language (e.g., "Never say 'ain't'"). Instead, linguistic rules are generalizations about language structures, operations which can be applied to any string of language, and applied repeatedly. For example, one rule might state that a sentence (S) is composed of a noun phrase (NP) and a verb phrase (VP) and optionally another S. A second rule might state that a VP can be composed of a verb (V) plus a NP. Add one more rule--that a NP can be either a noun (N), a pronoun (PRON) or an embedded S--and we can now use these three rules to create an unlimited variety of sentences:




When children acquire language, it is convenient to say that they learn these rules of language. Of course they do not learn the linguist's jargon or notation. It

is more accurate to say that when children acquire language, they use their knowledge of language as if it were rule-governed in this manner. They do not need to learn lists of sentences. They can use a relatively small set of operations to produce, or generate, and understand an unlimited body of language.

There is a related sense in which children exercise creativity in learning language. While children do ultimately develop an adult-like set of language rules, it is not accurate to say that their early language is a broken or error-ridden form of adult speech. Rather, at every point during the course of development, children conform to their own internalized grammar. The clearest illustration of this comes from observations of how children inflect irregular verbs for tense and for number (14). Initially children may inflect irregular verbs in the adult manner: *I went to the store*. This form is probably learned by rote rather than by virtue of an internalized rule since later, when children learn the general operation of forming past tense by suffixing /-ed/, they will say: *I goed to the store*. This example of overgeneralizing a rule is clear evidence that the child is not imitating any construction overheard in the speech of adults, but rather is seeking linguistic regularities, creating a first approximation of a grammar. Later yet, children will overextend the rule in a new way: *I wented to the store*. Finally, they return to the adult form *(I went)* but this time treating it as an irregularity within the system, not as an isolated form to be imitated.

Other examples of overgeneralizations similarly paint a portrait of young children actively creating linguistic order--order which often runs contrary to the adult models around them. For example, many children produce sentences like: *I gots lots more crayons*. This apparently is an overgeneralization of the third-person singular present tense /-s/ inflection (e.g., "He walks," "He falls"). Children also undergeneralize. At one stage children produce yes/no questions in the standard adult manner: *Can't Bobby play?* They are also capable of formulating wh-questions (where, why, when): *Where can Bobby play?* Both types of questions require that the subject "Bobby" change places with an auxiliary verb "can". When attempting a wh-negative question, children typically do not transpose subject and auxiliary: *Where Bobby can't play?* (10), evidence, again, that children's language is guided by pattern but it is no mere imitation of the adult pattern.

Indeed, when we expressly ask children to repeat adult models, we generally find that imitated sentences reflect the child's own system of grammar as much as the supplied sentences. For example, a child who has not yet developed a rule for relative clauses will not be able to imitate these structures:

*Adult Model: The man who I saw yesterday got wet.*

*Child Imitation: I saw the man and he got wet.* (27)

In asserting that language learning is creative and not imitative, we need to be careful not to overstate the case. Clearly children learn the specific language patterns to which they are exposed. They do not invent unique languages, nor does a child brought up in an English speaking environment spontaneously learn to speak Portuguese. Moreover, individual children appear to differ in the degree and manner in which they engage in language imitation (27). But in the broadest terms, the proposition that language learning is creative does serve to acknowl-

edge the contribution of the learner--the child's own active exploration of and engagement in the world of language.

This realization encourages us, as teachers, to view our students as achievers. Too often we adopt roles like those of physicians, searching for signs of disease instead of health. We are more sensitive to errors than to successful manipulation of language. If, however, we appreciate the creativity of language learning, we recognize that each time a child utters or understands a novel sentence, an accomplishment of major proportions has occurred. When a child does produce an "error", we are less likely to see this as a sign of linguistic deficiency. Instead, we might regard at least regular "errors" in a more constructive light. They are reflections of a particular stage of competence through which the child is passing in the course of developing an adult set of language rules.

More concretely, we can begin to see the limited value of classroom activities which place students in the role of passive imitators. Repetition, memorization, and drill in adult language forms results in rote learning at best unless these activities are linked to language creation activities. As with the proverbial horse, we can lead students to language, but no amount of repetition and drill alone will get them to learn new structures unless the children themselves are actively seeking to assimilate new linguistic knowledge.

**The Drive to Learn Language: Part of the Human Endowment**

When we consider what differentiates the human species from other animals, language figures prominently. Language enables culture and civilization. Bees can communicate, can form social organization within their hives, but only in ways that are genetically predetermined. If a source of nectar is placed vertically over a hive, the bees cannot communicate its location and become disoriented. They cannot use their communication code creatively to talk about new situations in new ways. In recent years, much interest has centered around attempts to teach chimpanzees to use symbols. Some evidence suggests that chimps can combine symbols in original ways, as when one experimental animal combined the symbols for "water" and "bird" to describe a duck (24). These animals, however, never acquire extended language skills, and they must be taught to use symbols under very controlled conditions.

Humans, on the other hand, are not limited to inherited instincts. We can use our languages to talk about events never before experienced, to think about events that exist only in the realm of possibility ("what if..."). We use language to accumulate and build upon knowledge created in past generations. Humans do not need to rediscover the knowledge of their forebears. Moreover, we learn our native language rather effortlessly, at an age when our other intellectual abilities are not sophisticated, and sometimes we learn language in spite of severe obstacles.

Indeed, there is a biological foundation for language learning. The capacity--even the imperative--to learn language is literally prewired into the human brain. Evidence for this claim comes from several sources. Although children develop language at different rates, they do so in an invariant order. For example, infants learn the characteristic intonation contours, the musical tones, of their language in their early months (30). Children learn possessives ("Ball mine") before

they learn articles (''I got *the* ball'') (2). If a young child suffers a brain injury, the process of relearning language recapitulates this same order (17).

Other dramatic indications of the biological foundations of language learning pertain to the notion of ''critical period.'' Preadolescents have an easy time learning their native language and even second languages. Adults generally find language learning exceedingly frustrating despite their intellectual maturity and they rarely achieve the proficiency of youngsters only casually immersed in language environments. Preadolescents who suffer brain damage are often able to relearn language, while adult aphasics rarely recover language function beyond that which returns within the first few months after a stroke. All this suggests that the period before puberty constitutes a critical period of language learning during which children naturally extract linguistic regularities from the on-going stream of talk about them. This critical period corresponds to the period during which the human brain continues to mature, maintaining plasticity in making new neural connections.

Finally, we recognize that children learn language structure (though probably not vocabulary and broader rules for language use) more or less similarly despite appreciable differences in environment and in intelligence. A child who is entirely deprived of language input will be nonverbal (8), but children of deaf parents who are exposed to adult speech from other sources develop language in a relatively normal fashion. At intellectual levels above severe mental retardation, intelligence has little bearing on initial acquisition of language structures (17).

This biological ''drive'' to learn language has at least one major ramification for educators. Language learning is a trait shared by all members of our species. All our students are compelled by inner forces to acquire language. This translates to Monday morning pedagogy more as a matter of attitude than of technique. We may come to see our students--all of them--as endowed with the tools for attaining proficiency in language. If we see them as active learners, seeking to extract meaning and regularity from their worlds, then we see our own roles as, foremost though not exclusively, providers of language-rich environments for children to operate on and within.

Teachers have an important role to play in language development. Although most children have the capacity to acquire and to use language, intervention by educators can enhance this capacity. First, there are significant individual differences in the rates at which children learn language, and teachers may need to provide enriched input to students who appear to be lagging. Also, important developments in language learning take place during school years, especially with respect to how children learn to use their linguistic knowledge. Finally, although children will acquire language given even minimally adequate exposure, language development is rooted in interactive environments.

**The Emergence of Language Ability: Through Interaction, not Didactics**

The behaviorist view of language acquisition dominated linguistics up until the 1960s. In this view, a child learns to say ''botty'' because saying it results in a reinforcing experience: hunger is satisfied. Presumably a child learns to say, ''I would like a bottle, please,'' because this is rewarded by further parental approval.

It was assumed that children learn language much as they learn other skills. They are shown, or they imitate, smaller parts of a task. When they perform the task successfully, they are rewarded; when they perform incorrectly, they are punished. The smaller chunks, once mastered, are combined into more complex behavior for which the learners are further rewarded.

Research has already shown, however, that language learning is fueled by forces within the child more than by the external environment. Children produce language strings they could not possibly be imitating. They are creative. In learning language children are satisfying an internal, biologically driven imperative. Indeed, research indicates that language used simply for naming objects in the environment emerges as early, or even earlier, than language used for requesting objects to satisfy some need (9, 11). In addition, early single-word utterances are more than just isolated sounds. They have the intent and force of complete expression (1, 11).

Moreover, observations of how caretakers actually interact with children show little evidence that anyone is paying much conscious attention to language structure. Children are rewarded for the accuracy and insight of their expressions, not for their correct grammar (3, 18). If a two-year-old comes up with a stunningly grammatical utterance like,

*I poked my finger into the cake which was supposed to be for us to eat with our company tonight,*

her parent is not likely to respond,

*Good, Lizzy. I'm so proud of your language.*

On the other hand, if a child makes a wise observation, it will be applauded no matter what the form in which it is expressed:

*Child: Dark. Night-night. (Uttered by an eighteen-month-old looking at a picture book.)*

*Parent: (excitedly) You're right. You're absolutely right, Nan. It is night time and the boy is getting ready to sleep.*

During the school years, much of our language instruction takes the form of a direct assault on children's language skills. We provide reams of worksheets to drill students on verb conjugations. We teach the parts of speech and sentence diagramming. We correct all the double negatives we can catch yet ignore how children go about initially acquiring language.

Study upon study has examined the effects of direct instruction on the quality of children's language, mostly written. No other aspect of English/language arts instruction has been so intensively investigated. Experiments have involved traditional grammar teaching, structural grammar teaching, transformational grammar teaching. With only rare exceptions, this body of research supports three conclusions:

- Direct instruction in grammar does not improve expressive quality.
- Direct instruction in grammar does not "stick"; the material is soon forgotten.
- Direct instruction in grammar has a negative effect on students' attitudes toward English as a school subject (13, 29, 26).

(See also pages 61-68 on the role of grammar instruction.)

If direct instruction and correction have little effect on students' language skills,

how ought a teacher respond when a student violates conventional adult grammatical patterns? Let us consider three options.

Suppose you and your class are discussing manufacturing in America. Greg comments,

*It ain't no way America can get back into making money on cars for a long time 'cause the other countries, they gots more robots and computers than us. I saw that on the news.*

One way of responding would be to focus completely on the form of Greg's language:

*No, Greg. There isn't any way America can get back the car market. The other countries have more robots.*

to which Greg is likely to mutter under his breath certain unpleasant remarks about dense teachers. Moreover, he will probably learn to abstain from participating in future class discussions.

Another way of dealing with Greg's comment would be to acknowledge his ideas but also to take this as an opportunity for language correction:

*That's a good point about the need for modern technology, Greg. But you know, the class and I would have a much easier time understanding you if you had said, "There isn't any way" instead of "It ain't no way."*

Greg's probable reaction in this case? He knows that everyone in the room understood him perfectly well. He knows, in some tacit sense, that what you are objecting to is his informal style, a style which is actually quite appropriate to spontaneous peer conversation. He probably thinks you are a well-meaning person but cannot understand why you make a fuss about perfectly adequate communication.

Finally, you might respond directly to Greg's observation. Instead of commenting on its linguistic form, you might provide a model of appropriate syntax:

*I see. You're saying that technology is the key to competing in car manufacturing and that America has fallen so far behind in technology that we'll have a hard time catching up. Still, I have the feeling that good old American ingenuity will pull us out of this jam before long. What do the rest of you think about what Greg has just said?*

In a language-rich classroom, the teacher has faith that continued modeling and opportunities for practice will allow for ongoing language learning. The teacher in such a classroom recognizes that language develops in a climate of interaction, in which language structure is generally out-of-awareness, in which language is used for authentic purposes.

This fact is supported by studies of caretaker-child interaction. Even the prelinguistic genesis of language acquisition involves mutual interaction. Bruner describes the manner in which primitive symbolization is rooted in early nonverbal routines. The first step in acquiring referential language takes place through gaze. When caretakers direct their eyes at an object in the room, infants follow suit and thus learn that humans use signs to pick objects out of the environment. Later, this referring function is achieved through pointing and, finally, by verbalization--by naming (4).

Further studies of caretaker-child interaction indicate that the speech directed to infants and very young children is modified to conform to the needs of babies as "conversational partners" (21, 28). We have already noted that caretakers tend

to attribute meaning to children's utterances regardless of their formal correctness. Moreover, through tone of voice and even by taking both parts of the conversation at times, caretakers demonstrate their expectations of reciprocal interaction:

*Mother: Does Joey want rice cereal for breakfast this morning?*
*Child(age ten months): Syah.*
*Mother: Okay, we do have time to cook oatmeal if that's what you want.*

In addition, caretakers simplify sentence structure, use intonation and repetition to clarify meanings, use nouns instead of pronouns ("Here's daddy. Daddy is here to get his little Nomi."), and engage in the same sorts of language functions as do their children at each stage of development. Parents respond topically to their children's speech, extending its meaning rather than expanding incomplete sentence structure (5). In these ways, caretakers encourage active participation in linguistic interaction even with the youngest of children.

Nelson studied the early linguistic and nonlinguistic environments of several infants and identified a number of predictors of language proficiency (21). In addition to those factors already mentioned, television watching was negatively related to language development, while the number of excursions outside the home was positively related. Furthermore, caretakers who engaged in less directive forms of communication--more questions, for example, than commands--seemed also to be encouraging growth in language abilities. Some additional evidence at least suggests that caretakers who control and discipline their children with more person-centered statements ("Don't throw your trash on the floor; it makes my job so much harder to have to keep picking up after you") rather than position-centered ones ("Children should pick up after themselves") promote greater flexibility in later language use (7).

One type of interaction which children commonly experience both with caretakers and with peers is play, and there is an increasingly impressive body of research that suggests that certain kinds of play contribute enormously to language development. Play, by definition, is performed for its own sake, yet it is instrumental in bringing about positive side effects related to school achievement (15). Play, like learning, is active. Successful play encourages concentration and perseverance, and it entails abstraction from the here-and-now, as when a child must construct in imagination some desolate setting or dramatic scenario in which to stage a battle of space creature dolls.

One type of play that fosters language development is play in which the focus is on language itself (23). Children often engage in language play as an accompaniment to other activities such as coloring or preparing to fall asleep, experimenting with speech and nonspeech sounds, expanding and composing sentences: *Truck. On the truck. Red apples on the red truck. Apple truck.* Other language play involves rhyming, punning, riddling, and purposefully distorting language: *I know what you had for breakfast today. You had rock crispies.* The value of speech play for language development lies in the fact that through individual or joint activity, children have an opportunity to manipulate and explore language. Moreover, this exploration heightens awareness of language form, as do few other naturally occurring types of interaction.

The other kind of play which exerts a particularly strong impact on language

achievement is imaginative social dramatic play (25, 22). In social dramatic play, youngsters take on pretend roles, jointly invent and elaborate a scenario, and often use toys or everyday objects to represent other objects required for their imagined setting. Social dramatic play promotes language development because it depends upon verbalization. It builds interaction skills because the two or more players must coordinate their pretend perspectives. During the course of this interaction, players must make their meanings explicit for each other and must construct cohesive ties from one event to another--all through the medium of language:

*Liz: Let's see. This can be the house and in this corner can be the kitchen. I'm gong to wash the dishes now. You left the kitchen so messy.*

*Beth: And this can be the door that goes outside. Let's say I had to leave real quick and stuff because I was gonna be late for work.*

*Liz: Don't slam the door when you go!*

The classroom implications of research on the role of interaction in language development are straightforward. To foster and to sustain language learning, we want to create classroom climates in which talk is encouraged. We want to respond to children's talk topically, not evaluatively. We want to encourage playful, exploratory talk, imaginative talk. We want to model the kinds of language abilities we hope students will acquire. We know that we cannot teach them through drills divorced from purposeful communication. Most of all, we know that the greatest threat to language development is silent, passive, and socially isolating work.

**Language and Thought: Interdependent Development**

It is no small feat to be able to use a word meaningfully. To use a noun, say "doggie," a speaker must recognize that objects have existence apart from the settings in which they occur; they can re-occur in different backgrounds. In addition, each noun represents a class of objects and within that class, certain variations are tolerable: a doggie can have long hair or short hair and still be a doggie. Understanding a verb or an adjective might require even more advanced thinking.

A great deal of controversy persists over issues of developmental relationships between language and thought, with various camps arguing that one is prior to and independent of the other. It does seem apparent now, however, that we cannot understand growth in one of these abilities without taking into account growth in the other. For example, before a child's first words emerge, a concept of "object permanence" must be acquired (12). At the same time, learning a new term often enables us to think about the world in new ways. The word "vitamin," for example, was coined in the first part of this century. It describes a rather diverse category of chemicals--organic as well as inorganic--which we commonly lump together in thought as a result of having a common label for them.

As mentioned earlier, children's initial one word and two word utterances can have a variety of meanings. We need to interpret them in light of the contexts in which they are spoken. As it turns out, it is not possible to characterize this early language in terms of underlying *structural* characteristics. Some two-word sentences, for example, appear to be Noun + Verb combinations like "doggie all gone," while others look like Verb + Noun strings, "give some," for example.

Still other early sentences have the structure of Noun + Noun, "Jacky baby." Though structural regularities are difficult to discern, this early language is well described in terms of *logical* (or semantic) relations.

The three earliest logical relations to emerge are naming ("see moo-moo"), recurrence ("more moo-moo"), and nonexistence ("no moo-moo") (2). Arriving somewhat later are relations that can be characterized as follows:

***agent-action:*** *"Mommy go"*
***action-object:*** *"Eat nummy"*
***agent-object:*** *"Kai nummy"*

Later still we find:

| | |
|---|---|
| ***action-location:*** | *"Sit there"* |
| ***entity-location*** | *"Joby school"* |
| ***possessor-possession*** | *"Kai shoe"* |
| ***entity-attribute*** | *"car fast"* |
| ***demonstrative-entity*** | *"This key"* |

Relations between linguistic and cognitive development are also evident in children's vocabulary learning. Significantly, many of the objects with which an infant is most familiar--crib and floor, for example--are not named among the first words to emerge. All of the early words refer to objects which the child is able to act upon or manipulate--"key," "shoe," and of course "mommy" and "daddy." (21)

By the time children enter first grade, their vocabularies include about 2500 words (20). (It is no wonder, incidentally, that many children find the limited language of basal readers painfully understimulating.) On the path to this word mastery, children's meanings often diverge from adults'. In this respect, language learners exhibit the same kind of creativity in word meanings as they exhibit in their developing use of verb inflections. Idiosyncratic word meanings generally display overextension (6). It is common, for example, for "dog" to refer to all four-legged creatures. As the concept of dog becomes refined, children learn new vocabulary to differentiate canines from cats, cows, and porcupines. Similarly, children often take adjectives and relational terms to signify both their conventional adult meanings and their exact opposite. "Tall" may be overextended to mean "big", "long", "high", and "wide", but also may be confused with "short." "Up" may be used to express both "up" and "down" and the relational term "more" is often not differentiated from "less" until age four or five.

It is through experience with the world that the cognitive foundation for language is laid. For example, children acquire a sense of object permanence--and consequently their first words--by playing games like peek-a-boo, by discovering and rediscovering objects, by experiencing regularity and predictability. They acquire appropriately differentiated word meanings by coming in contact with objects that require new names, and herein lies the significance of thought/language relations for language education. Language develops in the context of experience. The richer and more varied the experience, the stronger the child's language. Classroom experiences which permit children to act upon and manipulate their environment are especially effective in promoting language abilities.

Language and thinking ought not be divorced at any age level. Talk and writing are critical tools for understanding our world (19). In secondary schools, in particular, we tend to compartmentalize and segregate language learning from subject matter learning, and in so doing, we handicap our students' capacity to assimilate knowledge. We deprive them of a means of categorizing and relating experience which can be just as helpful in mathematics or biology class as it is in English.

**Summary**

Children learning language engage in a process which is essentially creative rather than imitative. Through active exploration of their language environment, they construct for themselves systems of grammar and often produce forms which do not directly reflect adult models. The drive to learn language is innate, mandated by the biology of the human species. All students, therefore, should be regarded as possessing a magnificent aptitude for language learning. Children do not acquire linguistic knowledge as a result of direct instruction by their elders. Instead, language learning takes place during the course of interaction in which the goal is to communicate meaning, not to perfect sentence structures. Both parent-child interaction and various forms of play promote language development in this manner. The development of language and of thought are intimately intertwined. Children's earliest language is best described in terms of the logical relations expressed. Vocabulary development also reveals emerging abilities to categorize and distinguish things and events. Just as language provides children with a powerful tool for understanding the world, so does experience with the world provide them with a basis for rich language.

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## *How does oral language develop in children in grades K-12?*

It is common for child language researchers to claim that children know their language by the time they enter school. Statements like these appropriately emphasize that children are innately able to learn language and that they do so largely without any formal instruction. But the claim is accurate only in the limited sense that children do acquire a great deal of knowledge about language structure in their first five years.

*Grammatical Structures.* Still, some structures do develop much later (3). Examples of late developing linguistic knowledge include cases in which actor/object relations are not obvious in the surface grammar of sentences:

*Bubba told Ali to mow the lawn.*
*Bubba promised Ali to mow the lawn.*

*Bubba is eager to know.*
*Bubba is easy to know.*

Some speakers never learn these structures, yet function well enough in everyday communication (10). (In parts of the upper Midwest, incidentally, it remains perfectly acceptable to say, "Would you borrow me a dollar?")

*Speech Sounds.* Other aspects of language do not develop until middle childhood. Occasionally parents and teachers are concerned, for example, that a first or second grade child cannot pronounce all of the speech sounds. This is quite a normal pattern of development, however (21). The most commonly misarticulated speech sounds are /r/, /th/, /l/, /sh/ along with several consonant blends. There is little cause for concern if primary grade children omit or substitute for these sounds. Indeed, there is some danger that if we call attention to what is, in fact, within the normal range of development, we may bring about disorders of speech fluency such as stuttering.

*Syntactic Complexity.* Other important kinds of language developments that take place in the context of school years concern the manner in which children make use of the resources of language structure available to them. The speech of middle and high school students contains few structures that do not appear at least occasionally in the speech of primary grade children (14, 15). However, older students typically display greater syntactic complexity. Initially, young children may speak primarily in simple sentences comprised of one unelaborated independent clause: *We rode in the car. It was a long way.* Slightly later, the conjunctions

"and" and "then" become ubiquitous. Ideas are strung together like so many beads on a string, obscuring a variety of logical relationships:

*We rode in the car* ***and*** *it was a long way.*

*We got to the circus* ***then*** *we bought popcorn.*

Middle school children begin to use a great deal of subordination, resulting in increased syntactic complexity. For many children, the subordinating conjunction "so" appears often and expresses diverse logical relations. But different subordinating conjunctions can be used to combine ideas in more revealing ways:

*We rode in the car* ***because*** *it was such a long way.*

***When*** *we arrived at the circus we bought popcorn.*

Instead of subordination, more mature speakers combine ideas in more economical subclausal units. *Riding the long distance by car, we bought popcorn immediately upon arrival at the circus.*

The T-unit is an overall index of syntactic maturity which has been widely used in much educational research. ("T" stands for "terminable.") A T-unit is a main clause plus all associated dependent clauses and free modifiers (7). The longer the T-units, the more complex the syntax. In the sample below, the double slashes (//) indicate three T-units:

*Yesterday I went to the store the one on the corner with my mom//and she told me I could get ice cream there//but I couldn't get no gum 'cause last time I left it on the car seat//*

Since these three T-units contain a total of 40 words, the mean T-unit length is 10.33. This would be typical of the syntax of seventh or eighth graders (14).

T-unit analysis is a helpful descriptive tool which teachers can use to keep abreast of students' syntactic development. Some researchers have also suggested using T-unit analysis as a measure for *evaluating* children's oral language, but caution is in order here. Longer T-units do not necessarily constitute better syntax, especially in the case of narrative or descriptive discourse. Also the audience to whom we address our speech affects syntactic complexity. Even young children adapt their language in this manner; for example, simplifying grammatical constructions for children younger than themseives. In fact, this variability in the use of complex syntax is, itself, a benchmark of language proficiency..

Sentence combining is an instructional technique for enhancing syntactic complexity that has been embraced by many English/language arts educators (see pages 61-68 on grammar instruction in writing). Sentence combining is attractive for several reasons. Exercises can be conducted in speech or in writing; usually in both. Students find them motivating. The value of sentence-combining as a sort of daily exercise is well documented not only as a means of increasing syntactic complexity but also as a means for improving quality of expression and perhaps also reading (20). Sentence combining is versatile, and teachers can easily construct exercises appropriate to their students (4). Perhaps of greatest importance, sentence combining represents a concrete response to public and professional demands to "do something" about children's language proficiency. As discussed in the chapter on early language development, direct instruction in formal grammar has little effect on students' language skills, but sentence combining does. In fact, sentence combining is apparently most successful when it is least encumbered by

grammatical terminology and prescriptiveness (16). Sentence combining is no panacea, however. Its goals are limited, and it is not to be confused with instruction in rhetoric and communication.

*Cohesion in Language.* Children learn not only to connect ideas within sentences by means of the resources of syntax, they also learn to make links between sentences and thus create meaning across longer stretches of spoken or written discourse. This quality of language--to carry and refine meaning along extended units of discourse--is known as "cohesion." Early studies of cohesion that are currently being conducted suggest that children make radical shifts in the ways they make whole talks and compositions meaningful, and that these shifts are especially important during the first few years of school as students are developing the language of literacy and of formality (9).

Notice the way a first grader, recounting to his parents a magic show he had seen at school, creates cohesion in his narrative account:

*This guy came in with two rabbits. They were real ones too! He said that one was good but the other was bad and always getting into trouble. He put them both in his hat. Then he took the good one out but the bad one disappeared. He wanted to play football and so he reappeared in this football helmet.*

The story holds together and is interpretable because of a number of devices. In the second sentence, for example, "they" clearly refers to the rabbits, and this connection is further reinforced by the substitution of "ones" for "rabbits." In both cases when the word "but" appears, it creates a contrasting link that clarifies meaning. There are some inadequacies in this passage, however. In the final sentence the pronoun "he" is ambiguous. Still, the typical word pattern "disappear" (in the previous sentence) followed by "reappear" makes it pretty obvious that the rabbit, not the magician, was found inside the football helmet.

With experience and age, children become more adept at making their discourse cohesive. They are more careful to use pronouns with unambiguous referents, for example. But this skill does not emerge because they are taught about cohesion in any explicit way. Instead, children learn to construct cohesion in texts when they are provided good models, well written stories for example, which they can experience in a variety of ways. Also important is a classroom emphasis on meaning rather than on language form.

*Language Functions.* We have been discussing continued development in knowledge of linguistic rules, in articulation of speech sounds, in syntactic complexity, and in cohesion. There is an additional aspect of language development upon which schooling exerts the greatest impact, an aspect of language learning which continues long into adulthood and which indeed has no developmental end point. We refer to this type of language learning as "functional" language development. (A similar term is "pragmatic development.")

A concern for functional language development focuses attention on the purposes speakers can accomplish by liguistic means. To clarify this point, consider what could happen if we ignore language functions in ordinary conversation:

*A: Can you pass the salt?*

*B: It's not too heavy. It's within reach. Yes, I'm sure I can.*

Although A's utterance is phrased in the syntax of a question, it is surely intended

to function as a request. That is why B's answer--a proper response to a question but not to a request--is so jarring. A more appropriate response would relate to the function rather than the form of the initial remark:

B: *Sure. Just a second while I finish with these mashed potatoes. Here you are.*

Even at the single-word or holophrastic stage of language development, children engage in many communication functions. An utterance like "Night-night" can take on many meanings:

*I am going to sleep.*
*I want you to put me to bed.*
*You are going to sleep.*

Similarly, at the two-word stage "Mommy sock" can function to mean,

*This is mommy's sock.*
*Give me mommy's sock.*
*Mommy, go get a sock for me.*

In order to interpret the meanings/functions of this early language, we must engage in what researchers call "rich interpretation" (1). We take the social and physical context into account in assigning meanings to children's utterances. Caretakers do this quite naturally. Emmy, eighteen months old, stands in the bathroom and grunts, "Uhnn uhnn." Her father responds, "You want to brush your teeth, do you?"

As part of functional language development, children also must learn to use physical and social context cues as a means for interpreting language. A five-year-old may have difficulty recognizing that "Do you know what time it is?" can, under certain conditions, function as an equivalent to "You go to bed right this minute!" Conversely, pre-school children are apt to use deictic or "pointing" pronouns even in the midst of a telephone conversation in which their listeners could not possibly understand their references: "Danny, I got one of those things just like that one you have but I dropped it back there."

We can categorize the language functions which children must learn in any number of ways. We can, for example, list all of the acts that can be accomplished purely by means of speech (demanding, denying, pleading, promising, naming, asking, requesting, and so on) (19). Still another list of language functions that was devised to aid teachers in generating activities for instruction in oral language includes 1. informing, 2. controlling 3. expressing feelings, 4. imagining, and 5. ritualizing--to which we might add 6. analyzing or problem solving. It is important for us to become aware of these language functions and to examine our teaching to ensure that we expose our students to a full range of language experiences.

Functional language development is, again, a matter of life-long learning. We can always become more adept at speaking with particular audiences, handling difficult situations. In communication tasks which require description, kindergarten children may use language which would be functional only for someone who shares their unique perspective: *That one looks like mommy's hat she wore that one time she got all dressed up (11).*

In persuasive communication tasks, fifth graders often resort to bribes, threats,

and pleading even in addressing high authority listeners. By ninth grade, though, students generally reserve threats and bribes for use with peers. They appropriately direct elaborate listener-centered messages to high authority figures: *I know you'll want to buy this newspaper because it's done by kids who were in your class last year and so you'll see how much you really taught them (17).*
High school seniors can begin to see the need to intersperse both specific details and abstract generalizations in their discourse: *The world is getting to be a harder and harder place to live in. We can all help by doing some little things like saving our used jars and bottles for recycling.*
More practiced adults, to a greater extent than even twelfth graders, will use language to direct their listeners' attention to points of particular significance (18): *And there's one more reason why you should recycle your glass, and this is the most important reason of all...*

Schooling can contribute significantly to promoting children's functional language development (2, 13). The teacher's role in this regard is not so much to teach children about language structure, for children have acquired much knowledge about linguistic rules prior to school. Rather, the teacher guides children in applying their linguistic knowledge to achieve various language functions, especially in unfamiliar social situations. By providing opportunities for using language in these ways, teachers assist children in developing language fluency, range, precision, and effectiveness. Without this sort of exposure and guidance, the child's language will not become fully realized.

*Oral and Written Language.* Before leaving the subject of continued language development, one final point about relations between oral language and writing is in order. Development in written language does not necessarily follow the same course as development in spoken language. Children appear to be conscious at an early age that writing is not simply transcribed speech (5). Many language features which appear in children's speech will never find their way into their writing. For example, there appears to be less interference in writing from nonstandard spoken dialects than some educators presume (6). On the other hand, speech does provide a functional basis for early writing; for example, the frequent use of the second person pronoun "you" in young children's compositions. In middle school years, some children begin to sharply differentiate writing from speaking, so much so that writing takes on a stilted, hypercorrect tone. Mature writers find some way of reintegrating spoken language into their writing, thus attaining a quality of "voice." (12) Teachers ought not expect that by working with students' oral language development they will necessarily reap benefits in written language. In some cases, like learning how to describe objects for an unknown listener, there may be carryover. In other areas, like correcting lack of agreement between subjects and verbs, there may be no transfer.

**Summary**

Children acquire knowledge about virtually all patterns of sentence structure before ever entering school. But along with that small set of late developing language structures and speech sounds which are acquired during the school years, children grow in their ability to *use* their language resources. In particular, they

attain greater syntactic complexity by combining ideas within sentences in more economical and logically revealing ways. Syntactic complexity can be enhanced through sentence combining exercises, though these should not be thought of as a complete program in language for communication. Children also learn to make connections between sentences, extending meaning throughout entire talks and compositions. This skill in creating cohesive discourse is promoted by experience with good language models and by a focus on meaning rather than form. The most significant language development during the school years involves growth in using language to achieve various communicative functions. Teachers play an indispensable role in exposing students to a wide range of functions and guiding their continuing progress.

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***What are the stages and sequences in the development of writing abilities K-12?***

Learning to write has a number of distinct stages that are posited by researchers. Hildreth (13) reports five stages from aimless scribbles to units closely approximating actual letters. She concludes that writing improves in this early period without direct teaching. Clay (6) notes that five-year-olds follow certain principles in creating a message that may contain what she terms "sign concepts" or "message concepts" that combine known elements to create new elements.

DeFord suggests that "a linear description of development is impossible since children may utilize a sentence or message format while exhibiting little control of letters and words." She lists ten stages, from scribbling to forms of discourse, suggesting that while they are not sequential, they do indicate the growing sophisitication of the writer as children's strategies and concepts become refined and reflect the conventions of written language (7). Although a specific sequence of development is reported in Walter Loban's thirteen-year study of language development, he suggests that "drawing up a valid chart of sequence and stages is hazardous; at any one age children vary tremendously in language ability (17)." He later comments that linguistic stages are no more discrete and sudden than stages of physical growth.

Clearly these researchers are describing the developmental stages through which children learning to write pass. For a discussion of the stages of the composing process (pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) see pages 53-54.

Children develop at different rates and times, and both teachers and parents are aware of this fact. Children's growth patterns, physically, socially, mentally, and emotionally, proceed unevenly, and this is normal and expected. It is hardly surprising that the component skills of language develop in much the same way. Because of the complexities of writing, it is as difficult to identify a fixed sequence of development in writing abilities as it is to formalize rigorously children's growth patterns.

There are known sequences in the development of writing--from gestures to scribbles, to symbols, words, and finally stories (15)--but it is also known that children move through these stages in other than linear ways. Many researchers have discovered an unevenness in the development of writing according to children's age, their sex, their knowledge of words, the context, and their problem-solving abilities.

**Contexts for Learning to Write**

It is the task of the teacher to discover what individual children know about written language before instruction in writing can begin. So it is important to know that researchers generally acknowledge that children know much more about written language than we have previously believed. Through observation of writing behavior, interviews, analysis of products (10), and looking at children's planning strategies and use of cohesive structures (16), as well as by studying what children know and expect from print and what strategies they employ in controlling their written language (12), we are now more aware of children's understanding of written language.

King and Rentel have suggested that a framework is needed for understanding how children's intentions in learning interact with varying learning contexts as they make the transition from speech to writing. In particular, the framework should focus on how children develop control over the written medium (16).

Dyson studied the ways children make the transition from speech to writing and found that "talk was an integral part of beginning to write, providing both meaning and, for some children, the systematic means of getting that meaning on paper" (8). A crucial factor in the development of writing that links oral language to written language is sustained speech. Britton (3) recognizes children's reliance on their ability to transfer their talk to the production of written objects. Moffett (19) suggests that children who can sustain a conversation and keep on the topic can more readily use what they write as cues to go on to the next line. Applebee (1) found that children made use of sustained speech in telling and retelling stories.

A number of researchers propose that the way in which we learn is reflected in the way we use the knowledge we possess. Children tend to store information from stories they have read or heard and then, selecting from those memories, incorporate certain aspects in the content of their writing. For example, Thorndyke found that the degree of plot structure or organization in a story was a significant factor in how much of that story was recalled (21). Applebee (2) analyzed stories of very young children for the extent to which they adopted the narrative conventions of "once upon a time," "happily ever after," and the consistent use of the past tense. He found two-year-olds used at least one convention in 70 percent of their stories and five-year-olds used all three in nearly 50 percent. Stories also grew longer and more complex as children matured.

Children who hear many stories do indeed internalize a sense of story that they in turn will draw upon in creating their own text (4). The value of exposure to story is reflected in Favat's analysis of fairy tales as well (9). He found that children are attracted by the predictability of fairy tales.

Another factor that influences production of text is the context in which the story or experiences arise. When children write as the result of their own conversations or personal experiences they are not under the same kind of stress as when they produce text using someone else's framework or experiences (18). Teachers and students who have explored a new environment together can more readily discuss and build common understandings. The students can then organize and select events that impressed or concerned them, and thus their text will be shaped by the context in which those experiences occurred.

Writing is a matter of solving problems. How do children decide which events are the significant ones to write about? How will they decide to interprete and organize their experiences? Chafe suggests three levels of decision making that he labels "schematizing, propositionalizing, and categorizing" (5). These include how to interpret particular bits of knowledge, how to select "chunks" to be expressed in sentences that provide essential details, and the task of selecting appropriate words and phrases within a sentence. Graves has studied the ways in which children solve problems of composing, spelling, and handwriting as they write (10).

Writing activities that present writing problems--for example, writing directed to a new audience, in an unfamiliar format, or with a different purpose--encourage children to reach out for appropriate language with which to deliver their message. The identification of audience will help children to recognize the need for a different organization of information and choice of words, and for selection of a style appropriate to the reader.

In examining the writing processes of seven-year-olds and in particular a case study of one child, Graves reached the following conclusions: "At any given point in a writing episode, many variables, most of them unknown at the time of composing, contribute to the writing process. Children write for unique reasons, employ highly individual coping strategies, and view writing in ways peculiar to their own person. In short, the writing process is as variable and unique as the individual's personality" (11).

Writing does not improve as a simply upward-sloping line smoothly rising from "poor" to "good" but instead progresses unevenly with many periods of regression as new styles are attempted or the context demands a different form be used (17). Errors are natural as students try out new ideas and present materials to be read by different and unfamiliar audiences. This "developmental irregularity" is experienced by child and adult writers alike.

**Implications for Instruction**

Classroom instruction in many subject areas is often carried out in accordance with some type of curriculum guide which designates the scope and sequence to be followed in each content and skill area. These charts are important to instruction and most try to reflect the developmental stages of children as well as the realities of the classroom. Great care must be taken, however, when creating such charts, and, when using them, that their proper role in the total instructional program be kept in perspective. Teachers need to be aware at the outset that some scope and sequence charts seem to be developed more for the convenience of instruction than for the development of abilities in children. Scope has been defined by Oliver (20) as the "*what*" criterion: What is to be included? Sequence he defines as the "*when*" criterion: When should a body of knowledge be offered; when should it begin? He adds duration as a "*how long*" criterion: How much time should be spent on a topic? Keith broadens Oliver's definition in stating, "The scope and sequence of curriculum organization is the cultural group's expression of its values, goals, and behavioral norms...It seems apparent, however, that the only real sequence is that which the learner himself develops in his handling of concepts and skills" (14).

**Summary**

An important tool for classroom teachers is the "scope and sequence" chart. These charts analyze large skill areas like reading or arithmetic, and break them down into smaller units. Often these units are sequenced on a "pre-requisite" model. That is, mastery of sub-skill A is required before sub-skill B can be learned. Usually, scope and sequence charts are related to the developmental stage which the learner is assumed to be at.

Such a comprehensive approach to the teaching of writing does not seem possible because of the wide range of normal development among children at any given age.

Various researchers have suggested stages or essential elements in writing development, but none claims that his or her list is not subject to change as further findings are revealed and new avenues explored. They all observe that many levels of writing ability are found in children at any given age or experiential level.

However, when planning instruction, teachers need to ascertain the facility with which their students use language and then design activities and experiences which will promote and foster writing skills for all children. Competency statements developed by school districts or textbooks may provide a convenient way to organize instruction or to articulate goals, but these statements should not be seen as reflecting either a statement about children's development nor even about necessary relationships among language components.

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# *CLASSROOM CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS*

***In the last few years, many researchers have focused attention on the "process" approach to writing. "Process writing" requires that we take a fresh look at how we teach writing and other of the language arts.***

***Exactly how does classroom instruction differ if we adopt a process-oriented approach?***

Most children begin their formal education in writing after they have learned to decode printed language and to comprehend what they read at fairly simple levels. Early in the first grade, children learn to write their name, names of familiar people and objects, and simple, short sentences. By the end of the first grade, they are able to put two or three simple sentences together. By the time children are in the third grade, they have been introduced to the notion of paragraphs (if not the actual term) and of connecting simple sentences with "and" to make compound sentences. From fourth grade on, the goals of writing instruction are to help students become proficient writers of essays: expressive, narrative, descriptive, and persuasive; to teach them the fine points of sentence structure, usage, grammar, syntax, and organization; and to improve their vocabulary and spelling.

These are not unworthy goals, but they are seldom attained. Too few students graduate from high school with the ability to write a well-structured, interesting essay of any kind. College instructors and employers alike find that some students and employees must be re-educated (or, indeed, educated for the first time) if they are to function in courses or jobs that require even elementary writing skills.

It is not that their teachers have not taught the skills necessary for students to learn to write well. It is, rather, that the students have not been able to *practice* those skills in a meaningful way as often as is necessary to internalize the skills nor in an environment that encourages writing for enjoyment, for self-expression, and for understanding.

In many classrooms, the mechanics of writing are taught separately from the act of writing. Children are asked to complete worksheets, to find mistakes in sentences written by someone else, to write sentences using new vocabulary words (or to incorporate all of the new words in a single paragraph), and to take tests where their ability to "write" is judged by their ability to fill in the blank or to pick the right answer from among four choices on a multiple-choice test. They are asked to write stories, paragraphs, or essays perhaps only once a week. In one study of three school systems, children in the second through fourth grades wrote an average of one piece per month (7). The topic is usually assigned by the teacher, or the children are allowed to choose from a list of topics. There is little interaction between the teacher and the student until the final product has been turned in, and students are seldom given an opportunity to revise their work.

A recent study of writing done by secondary school students in six major subject areas (1) found that students at the secondary level are generally not given increased opportunities to practice and refine their writing skills. The study included a year-long observational study of ninth and eleventh grade classes in two schools and a national survey of secondary school teachers to determine their attitudes toward writing, the kinds of writing tasks they assigned, and the nature of related instructional activities.

In the observational study, students observed spent only 3 percent of their class time engaged in the writing of a paragraph or more. In the national survey, 754 teachers who had been nominated by their principals as "good" teachers responded to a questionnaire. They taught in one of six subject areas--English, science, social studies, mathematics, foreign language, or business education. "Thirty-two percent of the teachers said they *never* assigned . . . (writing of a paragraph or longer) to the students in the class on which they were reporting. Only 31 percent reported *frequently* using such writing tasks" (1).

Such discouraging data lead to the development of three "points" upon which the advocates of a process-oriented approach to teaching writing rely:

1. Most children learn to read because all people involved in their education--their parents, teachers, school administrators, and the community--believe it is a skill which is essential to all subsequent learning. The same is true of mathematics, though the focus here tends to be on computation rather than a more expanded view of mathematics as problem solving. These skills are learned because large blocks of time are devoted to them during each school day. The first point, then, is that if children are to become proficient writers, time must be set aside each day for them to write. Children need to be encouraged to write frequently and at various times during the school day. This is true regardless of the instructional approach used.

2. However, time alone is not enough to insure that children will learn to value writing. Although most children do learn to read, very few become avid readers--readers who seek out books, magazines, newspapers, who even read graffiti, because they view them as mechanisms for expanding their understanding, for broadening their experience. How many adults do you know who are addicted library users? Most children also become fairly efficient users of basic computation skills, but few are so excited about mathematics that they sign up for higher-level mathematics courses in the secondary grades. If children are to believe that writing can be a lifetime tool for learning, for self-expression, and for communication, they must, from the time they begin to draw and to form letters, be encouraged to use writing as a means of expressing themselves. Writing must be the result of their need or desire to communicate some message. It must not result from a feeling that they have to try to please the teacher. The teacher's role is to provide opportunities for children to write, to help them learn that writing is a series of processes, and to guide their learning through responses that are accepting and encouraging (1).

3. This leads us to the final point. If children are to develop the attitude that writing can be an effective means of expressing themselves, they must have frequent opportunities to write for audiences other than the teacher. They must be

encouraged to write for many different purposes and to diverse audiences, such as their peers, members of their family, their local police department, the mayor of the city, and so on. Most important, writing for different audiences must grow out of the individual child's own needs and desires.

**The Process Approach to Writing Instruction**

Over the past fifteen years, a group of researchers and educators, including Donald Graves, Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, James Britton, and Robert Gundlach (2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) have begun to talk about writing as a process and to stress the importance of having children learn to write by creating a classroom environment which encourages risk taking, lots of writing, and building on children's already extensive knowledge of language. Proponents of the process approach to teaching writing suggest that children like most mature writers can effectively use several stages in the development of a piece of writing. Although they may be given different names by different people, the stages generally involve planning for writing, writing, and rewriting. The following stages and their descriptions represent a general overview of writing as a series of processes:

*Prewriting*. This involves conceptualizing--getting the idea, mulling it over, expanding upon it--and planning how you will approach the topic. Prewriting can mean talking an idea over with peers or your teacher, reading about the topic and thinking about how what you have read fits with your own ideas, actually doing library research on a topic, jotting down ideas, and writing an outline. Murray (11) suggests that much of the prewriting stage is spent in rehearsal, a process in which the experienced writer begins to gain control of the subject in a way that will help him or her produce a working first draft. Prewriting can take 10 minutes, two hours, a month, or longer.

*Drafting*. This stage involves making a first attempt at putting your thoughts on paper. It may be a fairly free-flowing piece of writing, or it may closely reflect the organization you have in your head or the outline you have written. Your goal in writing a first draft is to get your ideas down on paper. You probably won't spend a great deal of time making sure that every comma is in the proper place or that there are no misplaced modifiers, but some writers do pay attention to these details at this stage.

*Revising*. When you have put all your thoughts on paper and, ideally, have had some time to let your thoughts drift elsewhere for a while, you can go back over your writing to be sure that it conveys the message you wanted to send. You might find that you want to make only a few minor changes--perhaps an expanded beginning or an additional sentence here and there--or you might decide that you want to completely reorganize the piece. You might go through one, two, or several revisions. Stimulated by the writing you have already done, it is possible that you will get an entirely new idea and decide to do some more thinking about the subject or to start your draft over again.

*Editing*. In the editing stage, you take a close look at the writing you have done. You check for misspellings, correct errors in grammar, check your punctuation, and possibly rewrite or retype so that it will be as neat as possible.

*Publication*. This is usually the final step in the writing process and has a va-

riety of meanings, from publication by a commercial publisher to creating a class newspaper, to putting children's papers in a bound volume to putting a letter in the mail. It is, in essence, the delivery of the product to the intended audience.

Although the stages described above are the basic stages through which an experienced writer goes in developing a piece of writing, they are neither mandatory steps nor linear. Some writers may go through a prewriting process, write a first draft, and consider it complete. Others may go through all the steps and be in the editing stage when they suddenly have a new thought which needs to be explored and incorporated. Some writers never reach the final draft stage.

In addition, all of the stages involve sets of processes and subsets of those sets which go on in the mind of the writer and which, as stressed in the reports of studies by Flower and Hayes (4) and Perl (13), are recursive. At any stage in the process, a thought, a reaction to words on paper, a response to something someone says, a sudden recalling of a distant piece of information, or some other stimulus might result in a change in the writer's perception of the piece of writing.

We can recognize the stages in the writing process in many pieces of both informal and formal writing. The following examples demonstrate how several, but not necessarily all, of the stages appear in typical kinds of situations:

Contributing to a Church Newsletter

- The editor of the church newsletter calls to ask you to write a short article for the next issue. The article will focus on getting members to help solve the problem of keeping an adequate volunteer staff for teaching Sunday School. The editor talks to you briefly about some ideas for the article.
- Your article is due in five days, so you decide to spend the first two thinking things over and talking with one or two other members of the church. You also talk to a couple of friends and at one point you call the editor back for clarification.
- You write a first draft which you think is fairly persuasive. A couple of your friends at work and at home read it and offer comments. Their comments are helpful, but you're slightly dissatisfied for vague reasons you can't articulate.
- You're up against the deadline now, but you don't want to turn it in quite yet. In one last concentrated session, you reorganize the draft. That's it. You are much more satisfied with the power of your points as they are now organized.
- You read the article a couple of times more, change a few words here and there, type it up during a break at work the next day (still changing a few words and punctuation marks), and drop it off at the editor's house on the way home from work.
- The editor suggests a few changes, only one of which you don't agree with. After hearing your logic, the editor leaves it as you wrote it.
- The newsletter goes to press, is delivered, and you and the editor wait for reactions from the congregation.

Steps in Writing an Informal Letter

- You want to communicate with someone who is a friend or relative. You think about the message to be sent, usually while writing the letter.

- As you compose the letter, you structure it in some way--perhaps bringing the friend up to date through a chronology of events, or telling the relative of a series of conversations with a mutual friend. Your goal is to make the messages clear so that the reader will understand them fully simply by reading the letter.
- More often than not, you reread letters you have written, changing a word here or there. Often, revision takes the form of a P.S. Children sometimes write additional notes on the envelope after the letter has been sealed inside.
- You probably follow the conventions of letter writing, beginning "Dear," ending with "Sincerely," "Love," or some other standard close, and noting the date.

How might such a process look in the classroom? The following situation has Laura deciding that she wants to write about why eleven-year-old children should not have to change schools in the middle of the year.

- You are aware from your last conference with Laura's parents that they are thinking about moving. When Laura mentions it to you one day, your response is that she might want to explore how she feels about it, first by thinking about the bad things and the good things about moving.
- Laura does that by talking with her friends, who give her suggestions, and with her family--her father is sympathetic, but he stresses the good points; her brother and sister are also sympathetic, but they stress the bad points.
- Laura writes a list using two columns and shows it to you. You mention a couple of points that she has not considered and suggest that she talk with Carla, who has just moved and is new to your classroom.
- Laura and Carla come to you and ask if they can write a paper together. Because of her talks with Carla, Laura has changed her purpose for writing. She now wants to write a paper that will help children adjust to a sudden move. You readily agree and suggest a couple of resources that they might explore (they can talk to the librarian to see if there are any books about children who have moved, and they can call a local mover who might have some brochures about moving with suggestions for how to make the move easier for all members of the family).
- Laura and Carla proudly show you what they have written. You look it over and ask them a couple of questions about specific points they have made. You also tell them what you like about the work they have done, and you suggest that they show the draft to one or two classmates, ask for their comments, and then revise it.
- After you look at the revised draft and make one or two more suggestions, Carla and Laura edit their paper for "publication." You have suggested that they ask the principal if any other children in the school are moving or have just moved. You will make that many copies of the paper to be sure that each of these children gets a copy.
- You might also make a call to Laura's father and Carla's parents to give them some background and let them know you have made a copy of the paper for them.

Even though the process described above seems like a long one, it in fact might take only two or three minutes each time the children request a conference

with the teacher. Much of the work has been done by others involved in the process: family, peers, the school librarian, and, in this case, the principal. Laura and Carla have had a satisfying, relevant experience, writing to a specific audience for a specific purpose. They have also experienced all of the stages in the writing process.

**Classroom Activities Using the Process Approach**

*Prewriting*. Most classrooms offer countless opportunities for prewriting experiences. The important thing is to recognize these opportunities and to verbalize them. Drawing, for example, can be an important prewriting activity for very young children. As they grow older, children move to writing before they draw.

All of the content areas should be taken advantage of. Before children are taken on science or social studies field trips, for example, the teacher can let them know that they will have an opportunity to write about the experience, either during the trip or after they return. During the return trip on the bus, they can talk to the person they are sitting with about their ideas for the writing task. Talk is an important prewriting activity and can be encouraged in many ways. It can include teacher-student, student-student, and group interactions.

Reading is also an important prewriting activity. Children can use books, newspapers, magazines, and even other children's writing to generate ideas for their own writing.

Oral language activities such as reading aloud to children, playing records, storytelling, and talking in small groups can be used as stimuli for writing.

Prewriting should be, at least in part, a private experience. Children need time to explore their own thoughts and feelings, to organize and jot down ideas, and to develop a strategy for how they will approach the writing.

At the secondary school level, brainstorming, discussion, reading, and possibly doing library research can be important steps in the prewriting stage. Yet Applebee and his colleagues (1) report that prewriting activities in the classrooms observed averaged 3 minutes in length and usually consisted of instructions related to the length and layout of the paper. Teachers occasionally gave hints about the appropriate content (25 percent of the time), supplied outlines (10 percent of the time), and occasionally discussed the topic or model responses. In the national survey, Applebee found that the most popular technique used by teachers to help students begin to write was to have them get started in class; they could then finish their writing as a homework assignment. Eighty percent of the teachers surveyed preferred this technique (1).

*Drafting*. Writing of the first draft can be done as a group activity but will more often be an individual experience. The teacher should be available to the students for short conferences during this stage and the following stages. For young children, this can mean moving from child to child and making short comments -- asking questions and showing interest. As children grow older, the teacher might also be writing a first draft in order to serve as a role model. Conferences might be scheduled, or children might have a peer who serves as a sounding board and, later, as a student editor. In the junior high and high school grades, it is also important that time be set aside each day for students to write and

that adults around them serve as role models. During the drafting stage, the focus should be on the content of the message, not the conventions of writing.

*Revising.* During the revision stage, children have an opportunity to go back over their writing and make whatever changes they feel are necessary. This might mean changes in syntax, sentence structure, organization, and, in some cases, starting over completely. For the teacher, this may also be the most difficult stage to teach. Young children and older students alike resist the notion that their first draft is not final. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, for example, show that when given an opportunity to revise a piece of writing, few students at the thirteen-year-old and seventeen-year-old levels do much more than change punctuation or a word here and there (12). These findings are confirmed by Applebee (1), who found that 29 percent of the secondary teachers surveyed reported that they "regularly" asked students to write more than one draft, but few students reported making changes beyond spelling, mechanics, usage, or vocabulary choice.

Calkins as quoted in Gentry (5) suggests that beginning writers are reluctant to revise because they view writing as a one-step process. She has attempted to describe the early stages of revision for third graders and to offer suggestions for how teachers can help children move on to the next stage:

| *Revision Stage* | *Suggestions for Next Step* |
|---|---|
| Children don't independently reread or consider either their words or their mechanics. Writing is final, and for these children, it is extremely hard to put anything on paper at all. | These children can revise in other media (verbally, for example). They should also be encouraged to reread what they write. Questions like "What is your favorite part?" help them begin to look back. |
| Some children reread and correct their papers. They only make small editing changes, and they erase rather than cross out. They see each draft as a final copy. | If the teacher listens carefully to what this child writes and asks honest, real questions, the writer can learn that the reader needs more information. Content revision begins as "adding on." Usually children first add on to the end of their piece, and later they add on to middle sections through inserts. |
| Some children independently recopy their pieces. This is a step ahead of the child who merely corrects the original paper. Once there are two drafts, handwriting and spelling can be relegated to a later stage in the process, and the child can worry about content and language only. Also, as the child recopies, he or she often changes the original. | The next step is to learn to make the first draft into a working manuscript. Write all over it. Star it. Change it. Use it. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Instead of viewing the second draft as a copy, the child begins to see it as a second try. Usually the child will at first disregard the first draft and do the second one "from scratch." | Encourage the child to use the first draft. "What did you learn from it?" What needs to be cut? saved? changed?" Look first to the larger issues: content, sequence, focus. Later look at language, word choice, precision. |

Graves (7) and other researchers stress the need for conferencing as a strategy for helping students revise their writing. Conferencing can occur at any stage of the writing process as was demonstrated by Laura's teacher, but it is essential to the revising stage. It need not involve a great deal of time. In fact, an excellent means of conferencing is through the use of peer groups. Students can be assigned the task of reviewing one another's papers and making comments, asking questions, and offering suggestions. At this point, they are serving as content editors; later they might work with the same student or group of students as copy editors.

*Editing.* During the editing stage, students take a final look at their writing: correct misspellings, check their grammar, perhaps still change a word or phrase here and there. They might also do this for other students.

The degree to which the edited, final draft will be correct depends upon the developmental maturity of the student. Very young children will proudly hand their teacher a paper filled with invented spellings and mechanical errors. Many of these "mistakes" represent learning in progress and should not be of concern to the teacher. For older students, this might still be the case, but errors might also be indications of a need for guidance for the teacher.

At the secondary level, there is a strong focus on the editing stage of writing. Applebee (1) makes this point, but calls attention to its weaknesses:

> In current practice, this (editing) may be the stage of writing that is stressed most, though the purpose gets distorted in the process. In natural writing situations, editing is totally motivated by the fact that the writing is to be shared; the editorial changes are in the service of a polished final manuscript, not private criticisms for the author to read and file away. Teachers' comments on student papers are in many ways parallel to those of an editor, and it is not unusual for English classes to be taught some of the standard proofreading symbols. But in the classroom, the edited writing is not ordinarily about to be revised; it is simply evaluated for the writer's benefit, to be filed away rather than shared with others. However detailed and constructive a teacher's comments may be, their effectiveness depends upon the extent to which the students read the comments and upon whether simply reading them is enough to teach a student how to correct the errors. Since students rarely are asked to write another draft they have few chances to learn how to use an editor's suggestions and revisions to produce a better manuscript.

*Publication.* Publication of students' writing is the delivery of the writing to the intended audience. This might be, and in many classrooms usually is, the teacher, but it might also be classmates, other students in the school, parents, the President of the United States, a local business leader, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, or any of a number of other audiences. Writing

can take the form of an essay, a class newspaper, a bound volume of student papers, a letter, a telegram, or a collage.

What is most important is that children write with an audience and a purpose in mind. They will not learn to write for different audiences if they know that the only person who will read their writing is the teacher. More important, they will not develop an understanding of writing as a means of communicating with the people and institutions which influence their lives.

**Summary**

Teachers who decide to use the process approach to writing instruction in their classroom will find several things happening. Children will spend more time talking with one another and with the teacher. The teacher's ability to diagnose the needs of individual children and to guide their development will be strengthened because ofthis increased level of communication. Children will also spend more time writing and will be more highly motivated to write, not just in the language arts, but in all of the subject areas and during the hours that they spend away from the classroom. Finally, the level of trust between the children and the teacher will increase, because the teacher's role as editor will take precedence over the teacher's role as evaluator.

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***What is the role of grammar instruction in improving students' compositions?***

When grammar instruction springs from and links back to children's own writing, children will see the connection and use the new structures in their work. Research does not support the notion that an ability to perform grammatical analysis leads to improvement of students' oral or written communication. Indeed, some researchers feel that children younger than age 13 cannot work with abstraction so instruction in the abstractness of grammar may be counterproductive. Grammar instruction as an end in itself is unlikely to translate into better compositions. In 1950 the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* published numerous statements about the teaching of grammar, among which were these:

- Grammar is difficult if not impossible to teach to the point of practical application; and
- Formal and traditional grammar contain many items which if learned to the point of application could not have any serious effect on the learner's language use (9).

Very few questions, however, are as emotionally charged as the one posed here. Much of the recent research on writing pays very slight attention to the teaching of grammar in the composing process. Indeed, in a recent review of research on writing, several experts are cited who recommend that grammar instruction not be attempted before grade 7 (5). This recommendation is made because many children have difficulty with the abstract nature of grammar, or because such study will retard the development of the child's own language.

Other educators feel, however, that grammar instruction is necessary to help children learn to write well, to be able to use language correctly, or to be able to express themselves clearly. Parents often reinforce this idea. Traditionally in American education, the "grammar" school has been seen as the institution created by a nation of immigrants to homogenize the culture through language.

Before we can look at the role of grammar instruction in improving students' compositions, we need to define clearly what is meant by the term "grammar." From there, we can proceed to discuss effective instruction and ways to integrate that instruction naturally in the student's writing.

Most teachers mean a subject matter when they say "grammar." "Grammar" is taught by English teachers and consists of a set of rules which can be learned and which, when used, will allow the speaker or writer to duplicate the language used by the social class whose dialect is the standard of the language. In this def-

inition, differences among dialect groups are usually viewed as deficiencies which should be remediated. Thus, the view of "grammar" taken is a *prescriptive* one.

In this view, "grammar" becomes a value-laden term. By speaking "grammatically," the speaker is using the language conventions used by the socially prestigious class or group. Deviation from this standard indicates an imperfect use of language, a less than complete understanding of how the language really works. Because dialect, usage, and other conventions of language are all cultural phenomena, the listener (or reader) very often can have stereotyped reactions to the speaker (or writer).

It is this prescriptive view of grammar that dominates most "grammar" instruction. Children are taught to make subjects and verbs "agree" in number, to begin sentences with capital letters and end them with periods, question marks or exclamation points, to insure that "every sentence is a complete thought." Often, this instruction takes the form of memorizing grammar rules. Unfortunately, the knowledge of a rule does not necessarily lead to the employment of the rule (11).

**A More Realistic View**

If by grammar, however, we mean the rules underlying our use of language, then every child comes to school with a working knowledge of grammar. While students may not be able to talk about how language works, they can use language. The teacher does not teach grammar, then, in the same way that he or she teaches reading. Rather, by allowing children to use language--to speak and to write--the teacher can foster the development of language skills. By organizing instruction so that a child's growing ability to write is encouraged, several things will happen:

1. Children will develop fluency in the "physical" or "mechanical" aspects of writing. Writing difficulty may stem from two different problems: what to say and how to transfer the thought from the mind to the page. If this second area of difficulty can be reduced, then the writer's attention will be focused primarily on the first area. In order to reduce the difficulty of the physical act of writing, the muscles of the hand and eyes must be developed to the point that writing is not the literally painful task that it is for non-writers. Frequent opportunities to flex these muscles will reduce the physical difficulty.

It is the same for the "mechanical" aspects of language. Frequent opportunities for writing will develop the child's ability to use words, spelling, and punctuation in an almost automatic way. Frequent stops to check spelling, to erase, to revise on the mechanical level will not be required.

2. Frequent opportunities to write will also underscore, for the child, the differences between what can be said and what can be written (2). Not only will there be a desire to extend the repertoire of written forms at the child's command, there will be a need for more grammatical features which will arise from the child's desire to communicate. Thus, the "teachable moment" will be created.

3. Children will learn from each other. While it is possible to describe the stages of language development in children as a statistical group, it is clear that children develop language fluency and control different grammatical structures at

times and rates which vary from individual to individual. Such individual differences are especially evident in classrooms in which children from various socioeconomic backgrounds come together (7). Thus, by encouraging children to talk and listen to one another and to work in writing/editing groups, teachers will invite the flow of grammatical information from child to child as writing pieces develop. Children, then, will teach one another.

4. By presenting "grammar" in the context of the child's own writing, application of conventions will be made clear and practical. As early as 1908, George Carpenter and his colleagues questioned the ability of children younger than age 13 to understand the *abstract* nature of syntax. It is, of course, precisely this abstractness which is emphasized when we teach "grammar" as a system of rules of how language operates. If, however, syntax were taught in relation to the child's own writing and speaking, then the abstract nature would disappear and the child would be able to apply the syntactic feature for which a need is exhibited. Moreover, by delaying the attention to "grammar" until the editing stage of the writing process, the child has already wrestled with one of the major difficulties (what to say) and can now turn attention to the second difficulty (how to say it).

5. By helping students develop a sense of audience and of appropriateness of communication, the teacher can help children understand that the effectiveness of language use depends upon factors outside the child. Depending upon the nature of the communication, whether oral or written, children may need to use variations of standard English. As the child's sense of the communication's purpose develops, the need for selecting from among several linguistic items will be perceived. The language used when writing to a friend is different from the language used when writing to the principal of the school. Similarly, language used to convince a general audience of the rightness of a given proposition is different from the language used to write a ghost story. By setting writing tasks which are different in purpose and audience, the teacher can establish different language demand situations, thus creating a need to increase the number of language features available.

**Writing Mechanics**

This is not to suggest that "grammar" instruction should occur only in an accidental or undirected way, with each child deciding when or even if he or she needs to learn particular items of the language system. However, teachers do need to make a distinction between teaching "grammar" and teaching mechanics of use, and teaching writing.

By mechanics, we mean a series of conventions which help writers express extralinguistic features of language. Mechanics includes use of punctuation, handwriting, beginning sentences with capital letters, spelling conventionally, and so on. This system of symbols can be taught conveniently in the revising stage and within the context of the children's writing.

Teachers probably should not be too quick to insist that children learn the conventions of grammar and spelling. It may help to remember that before the advent of moveable type (seventeenth century in English), regularized spelling was not a matter of concern to writers. Writers spelled words to look the way they sounded

(Donne, Spenser, *et al.*). Regularized spelling largely rose out of the needs of typesetters.

Many children use invented spellings because learning the concept of writing down words--learning to be literate--is more important than being right, in the dictionary sense (1, 4, 5). Rather than helping children to write, insistence on cosmetic correctness may actually inhibit the child's willingness to write.

Invented spellings and grammar "errors" may also be viewed as important indications of the problem-solving process used by the child and can provide important data about the child's progress in learning to read and to develop writing fluency. What is commonly seen as a problem (the child's inability to include pronouns, for example) might better be seen as an opportunity for instruction. If the child's writing exhibits no need for pronouns, it is unlikely that a worksheet on pronoun reference will have much impact. If, however, the child is using pronouns in an awkward way, he or she may be very accepting of a teacher's demonstration of how pronouns can make the sentence more fluent. Similarly, showing a child how commas can help readers to understand the child's sentence will lead to more effective use of commas than will work on worksheets.

Grammar can be taught, in the upper grades especially, as a subject as worthy of study as other systems (biology, algebra, or literature). Even then, however, it should be taught to these older students in the context of their own writing. At any grade level, the teacher's ability to link grammar to the student's own use of language will underscore the relationship between what is learned and what can be used.

**Combining Sentences**

Many teachers have found that teaching students to combine sentences leads to more fluent use of language. By practicing the embedding of one sentence or idea within another sentence, students can learn to create sentences which are more interesting and can learn to use a variety of syntactic patterns.

The underlying notion of sentence combining is that fluent writers use longer, more complex sentences than do less fluent writers. Through a series of guided exercises, students are shown how several short sentences may be combined into longer ones. For example, a poor writer may write these sentences:

*William Randolph Hearst owned a newspaper.*
*He wanted to increase sales.*
*He wrote about war atrocities in Cuba.*

A more competent writer might combine the first two sentences:

*Newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst wanted to increase sales.*
*He wrote about war atrocities in Cuba.*

A still more competent writer might get all three ideas into one sentence:

*Wishing to increase sales, newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst wrote about war atrocities in Cuba.*

To increase fluency and add variety to students' writing, sentence combining can be very effective. Often, conjunctions or relative pronouns can be added in the exercises to guide the combinations:

| | |
|---|---|
| *The car was stolen.* | *The car that* |
| *It was red. (that)* | *was stolen was red.* |

Other signals might include underlining parts of one sentence to be embedded in the main sentence or using the word SOMETHING in capitals:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Joanna ate SOMETHING.* | *Joanna ate the* |
| *The fish was broiled.* | *broiled fish.* |
| and | |
| *We thought SOMETHING.* | *We thought that* |
| *We would pass the test. (that)* | *we would pass the test.* |

Sentence combining exercises have been shown to improve the fluency of students' writing, if fluency is determined by length. Hunt analyzed writing samples of 72 writers (drawn equally from Grades 4, 8, and 12 and a group of writers published in *Harper's* and *Atlantic*). He found that, indeed, older writers write longer sentences. But he found that the major difference between student writers and adult writers was that adults tended to increase clause length, not total number of clauses used. Whereas younger writers string clauses together, either with coordinating or subordinating conjunctions, adult writers used more nonclause elements to pack meaning into clauses (6).

Mellon urges caution, however, when using sentence combining activities. As early as 1969, Mellon conducted experiments which showed that merely giving students practice in sentence combining could actually have an adverse affect on student writing unless sentence combining practice was linked to helping students look at sentence effectiveness (8). Again, such an activity sets the stage for students' writing to occur. It cannot replace students' writing and thinking about their writing. Practice on controlled exercises is only a first step. It will be the students' ability to use the *results* of these exercises in their own writing which will determine whether the grammar instruction has contributed to students' growth as writers.

Sentence combining is a good example of grammar instruction which will extend the student's repertoire of writing skills and which can lead to better composition writing. Other exercises in grammatical analysis can be undertaken based on real writing produced by the students.

**Grammar-Based Activities for Better Writing**

Christensen, in discussing how a new understanding of grammar can lead to improved writing, makes the point that composition is a process of addition not of subtraction (3). He suggests that the typical sentence of modern English is the cumulative sentence. The main clause advances the idea, but the additions move backwards to modify or explain the statement of the main clause. (The preceding sentence is an example of a cumulative sentence.) Thus, the sentence imitates the thought *process* rather than presenting a sentence which has been pondered and shaped in draft before being presented in the final copy.

Christensen then has derived the principles of addition and direction of movement which can help students to understand how their writing works. Two other principles bring in the dimension of meaning and of texture. Usually the main clause is stated in general or abstract terms. Once this clause is stated, the forward movement stops and the writer moves to a lower level of generality or into singular terms. For example, a student might write: "Good friends are important, at least to me. When I'm in trouble, my friend Billy is there." In these sentences, a generality is stated in the first main clause, which is "stopped" by the specification "...at least, to me." The second sentence uses an adverbial clause and a specific to add texture to the idea that is being presented: "good friends are important."

Use of adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, subordinate clauses adds texture to writing by increasing specificity. Through understanding these principles and applying them to their writings, students can gain new insight into the value of variety and control of writing will lead to more competent writing.

**The Teacher's Role in Grammar Instruction**

Many teachers feel that students, especially those in the upper grades (7-12), need to know the meaning of terms like "noun," "adjective clause," or "compound sentence." This terminology can be taught to students. However, when grammar instruction is totally devoted to the learning of terms, it is difficult to see how the concepts identified by those terms will affect students' writing ability. It is the application of these concepts which is the goal. Students need to be shown how grammatical analysis can help them generate better writing. Like art for its own sake, grammatical analysis for its sake is an idea which will appeal to few. Even the teaching of a grammar system as a system should be tied to student-generated writing.

The teacher's role, then, in teaching grammar is quite different from being the guardian of correct usage and the arbiter of elegant standards. As a helper or coach, the teacher responds to the communication of the child, suggesting ways to strengthen the child's writing, or offering information about how language can be used to state the thought more precisely. As Weaver points out, the teacher's knowledge of grammar in a formal sense is far more important than the student's (11). As a coach or editor, the teacher who understands the grammatical relationships among words and sentences will see many ways to strengthen students' writing. These variations can be taught to students both directly--as in sentence combining--and indirectly, through editorial conferences.

As a role model, the teacher has two kinds of responsibility. One is the modelling of effective language structures. If children hear and see practiced the kinds of language which they are expected to use, they will be more likely to do so. The second responsibility is for the teacher to be accepting of the child's language. This acceptance is important for all children, but is especially so for children for whom standard English is not a first dialect or language or who may be developmentally or physically disabled. By working with the language used by the child, the teacher will not prescribe language change but will facilitate language growth and communication skills development. By avoiding judgments

about the "correctness" of language use, the teacher will provide a friendly environment in which children can explore and "try-on" differing language styles and can decide which language structures are appropriate, given the communicative purpose and the audience. Finally, by refusing to divorce grammar instruction from the reality of language use, the teacher will be able to help children develop an enthusiasm for the systematic nature of language and an eagerness to use that system to enhance their own writing.

## Summary

How can grammar instruction help make students better writers? If the instruction is integrally related to students' own writing, and if the instruction is geared toward application, grammar can make a difference. Sentence combining activities have been shown to relate to improvements in children's writing. But even these exercises must be presented so that the reasons for the effectiveness of the combined sentence is clear to the young writer.

The new view of grammar articulated by Francis Christensen suggests some new directions for teaching students to vary the texture and direction of their writing to increase interest.

What is clear is that the "memorize the rules" approach to grammar instruction does not--and probably cannot--lead to improvement in writing. Indeed, this approach may prove damaging to the writer's attitudes toward writing and in any case will take time away from the real task: writing.

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## *How can I teach students to organize their ideas effectively?*

The selection of an organizing principle is recognized as an important element in successful communication, whether in writing or speaking. If we want the listener/reader to understand our message, we need to provide as much help as possible. We need to select words which convey our meanings clearly and precisely; we may use examples or illustrations which make our communication more entertaining or forceful; and we use language which is familiar to the reader. Even if all these components are present, the audience still may not grasp the message unless it is clearly organized.

Students may learn to organize effectively, and the need for organization may be more readily understood, if organization patterns can be presented more or less simultaneously by the teacher both in a direct instructional mode and in less direct instruction based on needs demonstrated in the student's own writing. This two-pronged approach will allow the teacher to introduce students to several organizing techniques while leaving them free to select the one they find most useful.

When planning to teach organization of writing or speech, it will be helpful to remember that organization techniques reflect cultural values and traditions. Moreover, individuals think differently, view the same problem differently, and will find that some ways of organizing are more attractive than others (5). Thus, instruction in organizing will need to reflect these cultural traditions as well as individual preferences. There are several models for organizing an argument which can be taught quickly. Each of these models, of course, reflects a particular view of the world, a view passed to us through a rhetorical tradition.

For example, Plato taught a particular way to develop an argument. Using a series of question-answer-question exchanges, he would start from a generalization, break it into its component parts, examine each of these, and then put the components back together into a whole that was new. One of the organizational strengths of this model is that each question springs from the preceding answer so that a unified flow of writing (or speech) is the result.

A second very easy way of organizing writing or speech is by chronology: first this happened, then that happened, and finally, a third thing happened. We owe this organizing scheme also to the Greeks, who developed an interesting variation on organization by chronology by starting *in medias res*, "in the middle of things." In Homer's poems and in most Greek tragedies, the story opens with the listener right in the middle of the action. But sooner or later the story goes back to the beginning to give us all the background information we need and then con-

tinues from the point that it started. This only works, however, when the audience already knows the basic story. New information is not presented. Rather, a new view of known facts is given.

Still other ways of organizing include comparing and contrasting two ideas or events or objects; developing an argument inductively (going from the particular to the general) or deductively (going from the premises to the conclusion); or developing an argument along numerous models from classical studies of logic.

**Teaching How to Organize Writing**

The real point of this chapter is not so much how to organize. Rather, it is how to teach others to organize. Here, we run a very real risk of imposing our personal values or notions of organization on the young writer.

One of the awesome responsibilities of the writing teacher is to help a writer say what he or she wants to say without intruding too much. The teacher, as editor, must enter into the writing without supplanting the author. Very often, this requires the editor to role play the potential audience while attempting to understand what the writer wants to do. One sure way to "take over" the writer's task is by dictating changes of organization which please the editor but may not be appropriate for the writer.

Britton presents an illustration of this point (2). While walking on a beach, Britton picks up seashells which he takes home to arrange. He could arrange them according to one of two principles. One principle is the biologist's: the shells are needed to complete a specific display, and the arrangement shows the relationship of species of marine life. If a better biologist than Britton comes in and looks at the display, he could say, "You've got that wrong." However, since Britton is not a biologist a more likely arrangement is one which pleases him aesthetically. No one, coming to view the display, could say, "You've got that wrong," because with the aesthetic principle there is no right or wrong beyond the pleasure felt by the arranger.

How, then, can we help student writers say what they want to say while, at the same time, showing them how to present their thoughts in a way which will reach the reader? If a writer writes for self-expression, this is not a major issue. But if the writer writes to communicate to others, to inform them or to persuade them, it is incumbent on the writer to represent his or her thoughts in such a way as to help the reader understand them (3). Several methods for teaching organization are available to us. Some are relied upon, often to little effect, while others are seldom tried.

**Some Effective Organizing Methods**

Traditionally, the topic outline has been presented to students as the skeleton of the essay or report. Roman numerals are used for major topics, Arabic numbers for subtopics related to the major topic, and lower case Roman numerals are used to distinguish the sub-subtopics. (Remember "No A without B?".) This is cer-

tainly one way to organize a paper, but it is by no means a guarantee of organization, nor is it the only way to go about organizing.

A major difficulty with the traditional outline has always been seen as one of its strengths: its linearity. The outline forces the writer to develop the theme in linear fashion, whether a chronology is used, or a comparison/contrast, or an inductive model. Not all writers think in linear fashion, however. Sometimes one thought will generate another one whose relationship to the first is not always clear and "linear." This free association may be hailed by psychoanalysts, but it is anathema for the writing teacher who insists on an outline.

## Sequencing Ideas

If, however, you are willing to try some means other than the outline, ask pairs of students to write down thoughts related to the overall topic and in no particular order on separate slips of paper. Then the pair can lay all the slips down on the desk or table and begin discussing them, trying to find relationships among the individual ideas. Not only will this help the young writers move "ideas" around before becoming committed to them, but it will also help students learn that an idea can be discarded from the essay but still be a good idea. (Perhaps it can be saved for another essay.)

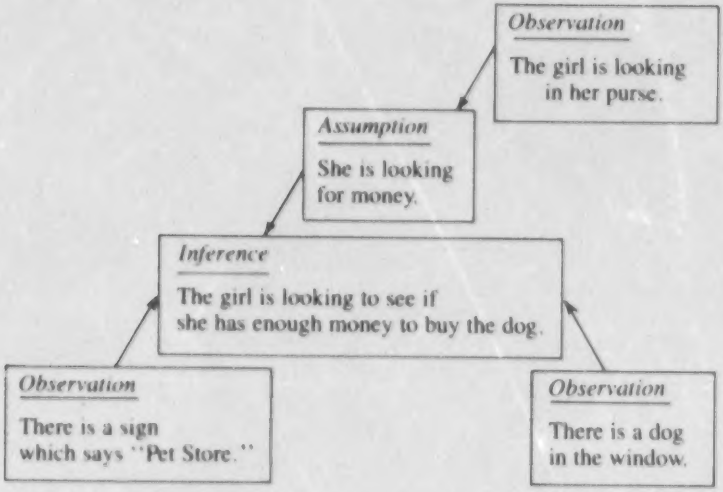
## Getting Ideas

Shaughnessy devotes a chapter of her book *Errors and Expectations* to the problem of teaching students just learning how to write to organize their writing (6). She shares several insights which are of value to all teachers of writing.

Shaughnessy suggests that students' writing often seems disorganized because the writing is really in a prewriting stage of development. The thesis statement, its supporting details, and logical transitions to secondary or related thesis statements are absent because the writer is still grappling with articulating the thesis statement. In this case, we are not presented with a finished product but with an idea in the process of being developed. Because the writer is developing the idea, his or her expression will probably be very egocentric. The writer assumes, for instance, that the reader understands what is happening in the writer's mind and, therefore, needs no transitions or explanation. Shaughnessy's suggestion, then, for teaching organization is to help students see how writers get their ideas and then begin to develop them.

"Getting ideas" activities might include developing lists and looking for relationships among the lists, or might consist of using a "think-link" activity. Think-links provide a means for both the generation of ideas and a visible means of finding connections among ideas. For example, students might be shown a picture of a girl looking in her purse while standing in front of a pet store in which a dog can be seen.

Students might use the think-links in this way (4):


Observation
The girl is looking in her purse.
Assumption
She is looking for money.
Inference
The girl is looking to see if she has enough money to buy the dog.
Observation
There is a sign which says "Pet Store."
Observation
There is a dog in the window.

Students, then, have made three observations (statements based on evidence) which led to an assumption and to an inference. The graphic charting of the relationships among the elements will help students organize the structure of a story they write about the picture. Moreover, students will also develop skill in developing the idea which will be at the center of their writing. Finally, by explicitly determining which items are observations, which are assumptions, and which are inferences, young writers can recognize the need for a blend of generality and specificity, concreteness and abstraction, and proof and inference in their own writing.

"Cut and Paste"

If you have read *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, you may recall a class which Holden Caulfield describes. The class was supposed to help students learn to "stick to the topic." Every time a student strayed from the topic, everyone else was to yell "Digression! Digression!" Holden, like most people, did not enjoy the activity. However, less vocal peer-editing groups can be helpful in getting a paper organized. If the group is paying particular attention to organization, they may find the "cut and paste" technique useful. This is a technique for organizing which many writers use. Once a draft has been written, the writer can cut the page apart and reorder the component parts of it. While this often results in a need to write new transitions, it is a very concrete demonstration of the need to pay attention to organizational matters. If the peer editing group suggests reorganization, this becomes a technique for preventing the young writer from losing interest in his or her paper because of the need to "rewrite."

Of course, these suggestions all proceed from the assumption that questions

of organization can be settled at the prewriting or revision stages of the development of the piece (1). Thus, this teaching method is inductive: by reorganizing the specific ideas in a student's draft, a larger sense of more effective organization will be realized by the writer. This is an especially appropriate methodology for working with very young children--up to age nine or ten--for three reasons. First, young writers tend to write less in each piece and so have less to organize. Second, the young writer is still very often writing for self, with less consideration given to audience needs, at least initially. Finally, the abstract nature of organization is often difficult for young children to grasp and therefore a coaching technique, to borrow Mortimer Adler's term, will probably prove most useful.

For students in the higher grades (6-12), two old ideas for the teaching of organization have emerged in new clothes. The use of writing models and writing frames have been used with good effect in the last few years. Before describing these techniques, however, some disclaimers are in order:

- Use of techniques to teach organization of writing must not be confused with actual writing any more than practicing place-kicking a football should be confused with playing football. The exercise is not an end in itself.
- Writers will gain far more from actual writing than they will from "practice" writing. Therefore, a larger percentage of time needs to be spent on actual writing than on practice.
- Student writers will readily accept instruction if it proceeds from their need to solve problems in their own writing or if they can see a connection between instruction and their own writing.

### Schematic Modeling

Such modeling allows older students (grades 8-12) to examine someone else's writing and analyze it. Usually the teacher presents a paragraph, section, essay, or short story by a well-known writer and points out the rhetorical/ organizational devices which this particular writer used to create the effect desired. For example, initial attempts to use this technique might focus on the number of words per sentence used by Hemingway as opposed to Faulkner. What different effects do the two writers achieve? Later, an analysis of the first paragraphs of Hemingway's story, "The Big Two-Hearted River," might reveal that a number of the verbs are expressed in the passive voice. What clues about the protagonist does this method give?

Once students understand how these writers have organized their work, a schematic model of the passage can be created as a class activity. That is, the content of the passage is removed and only the structure and relationships of the rhetorical parts are left. An example based on this passage from *1984* by George Orwell illustrates:

> For some time, he sat gazing stupidly at the paper. The telescreen had changed over to strident military music. It was curious that he seemed not merely to have lost the power of expressing himself, but even to have forgotten what it was that he had originally intended to say. For weeks past he had been making ready for this moment, and it had never crossed his mind that anything would be needed except courage. The actual writ-

> ing would be easy. All he had to do was to transfer to paper the interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head, literally for years. At this moment, however, even the monologue had dried up. Moreover, his varicose ulcer had begun itching unbearably. He dared not scratch it, because if he did so it always became inflamed. The seconds were ticking by. He was conscious of nothing except the blankness of the page in front of him, the itching of the skin above his ankle, and the blaring of the music, and a slight booziness caused by the gin.
>
> Suddenly, he began to write in sheer panic, only imperfectly aware of what he was setting down.*

Students will notice that the passage begins in present time, moves into the past ("For weeks past he had been making ready" ... "literally for years"), and back into present time ("At this moment..."). Further, the sensory distractions to which the character pays attention are all ways to avoid the task at hand. There is an ironic understatement in the sentence beginning "He was conscious of nothing..." Finally, much of the effect of the paragraph comes fom the description of sensory reactions: "he sat gazing," "strident military music;" "his varicose ulcer had begun itching unbearably;" "a slight booziness." The long delay is resolved immediately in the first five words of the next paragraph: "Suddenly, he began to write."

A model might take the following form:

Sentence 1: "For some time, he _____."
verb adverb complement

Sentence 2: Describe external change. _____

Sentence 3: State the problem: "It was curious that _____."

Sentence 4: Go back in time: "For some time past _____."

Sentence 5: Restate the problem: "All he had to do was _____."

Sentence 6: "At this moment, however, _____."

Sentence 7: Sensory digression: "Moreover, his _____."

Sentence 8: Further comment on digression: "_____."

Sentence 9: "The seconds ticked by."

Sentence 10: "He was conscious of nothing but _____(the problem)_____ and _____and _____."

Sentence 11: "Suddenly he began _____."

Students will select an experience of hesitation and, using the model, can write a passage parallel to Orwell's.

Sentence 1: For some time, he stood gazing down at the water.

Sentence 2: The breeze had stopped in the trees.

Sentence 3: It was curious that he couldn't jump.

Sentence 4: For some time past, he and Joe had planned to dive out of the big tree.

Sentence 5: All he had to do was step off the limb.

---

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Sentence 6: At this moment, however, the water seemed much farther away.
Sentence 7: Moreover, his arm ached from his tetanus shot.
Sentence 8: He hadn't seen the nail sticking up through the board and stepped right on it. Then he'd needed the shot.
Sentence 9: The seconds ticked by.
Sentence 10: He was conscious of nothing but the water below him, the breeze playing in the leaves, and the ache in his arm.
Sentence 11: Suddenly he began to step forward and was hurling through space.

After writing, students can compare their work with Orwell's and with one another's. For example, in this exercise, someone may suggest that Sentence 2 needs to be changed because Sentence 10 calls for a sensory impression but Sentence 2 describes the *lack* of it. The writer will be able to see how each of the parts of this passage interacts with the totality.

**Writing Frame**

A second device for helping students learn to organize is the writing frame, which is similar to the schematic model in that the student writer is given very specific instructions about how the sentence or passage must be completed. This is especially useful when beginning a new kind of writing. The following frame was developed by Yatvin for use with children in grades 4 and 5 (7).

Can you hear the wind as it sings through the trees?
Can you smell the _____?
Can you taste the _____?
Can you touch the _____?
When you do, you will know the _____?

By completing the last part of each line, the writer completes a piece based on the frame. By talking about his or her poem later, a sense of the organizing will come through. As Yatvin points out, not all writers need the frames and should not be forced to work with them. But many students will readily accept the frames as a means to solve their own writing problems.

**Summary**

Teaching students to organize effectively, then, will be easiest if such instruction is based on their own writing. As the piece is developed as a result of a conference between the writer and editor(s), organizational questions will be hammered out. If, as the teacher, you feel a need to give *supplementary* instruction in organizing, the use of models, frames, and outlines may prove beneficial. It should be remembered, however, that organization is both a personal and cultural value rather than an absolute. Furthermore, it is well to remember that learning *about* writing will not take the place of learning to write *by* writing. Most important, however, is the recognition that not all writers think alike nor do they organize alike. By providing instruction in organizing techniques and then allowing the writer to choose the ones that work best for him or her, the teacher can focus attention on the importance of organization as a quality of good writing, rather than expecting students to organize for the sake of organization.

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## *CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES IN COMMUNICATION*

***Some oral language and writing activities seem to delight students and teachers alike. Other activities are undertaken, because they have always been part of the teaching tradition. Chapters in this section discuss the value of several activities for fostering students' facility in oral and written communication.***

## *What classroom activities foster improved oral language?*

Oral language is an essential medium of learning across the curriculum. The ability to communicate orally has always been a concern of educators. Instruction has gradually been changing, however, from a primary emphasis on such in-school communication activities as public speaking, debate, and parliamentary procedure to communication as a more functional concern. The oral language needs of students frequently arise in out-of-school situations, and meeting these needs is now more often the primary instructional thrust. Certainly, educators must consider the need for all types of activities, but the development of true communication competence must encompass several things: knowing the variety of functions open to communicators and how best to implement those functions they deem important, as well as a knowledge of and practice in using the skills of speaking and listening. Mature communication competencies include fluency in both verbal and nonverbal behavior and an awareness of the circumstances in which the communication takes place.

Students of all ages bring a degree of oral language facility with them to the classroom, but they need guidance and practice to improve their competencies to more effective levels. Children's needs for communication instruction differ greatly, and their family environment is probably the most influential factor in determining those needs. Children growing up in a rich language environment, where adult models of speech are present and where the children are encouraged to interact with these adults and older siblings, will have a different language facility than those with a more restricted family environment that limits the child's opportunities to interact (2).

Children need an understanding adult in their quest to acquire the skills they need to become effective communicators. The teacher, therefore, can do much to help children gradually meet the oral demands of the school setting. Classroom activities that center on student concerns and stimulate problem solving and critical thinking skills while enhancing interest in the effective use of language will do much to increase the skills and awareness of the students involved.

The purpose of oral language has been to get one's thoughts and feelings to a listener. Oral communication is still our most prevelent means of communcation. Therefore, it is the school's responsibility to help students use language appropriate to a wide variety of situations, to match specific communication purposes, to increase their poise and assurance in group situations while improving their voice quality, and to understand common social techniques so that listeners are not distracted by poor language choices.

Oral communication skills are essential for learning to read and write and for continued learning throughout the school years. In fact, these skills are being refined throughout our lives as we learn new vocabulary and new contexts within which language is used. It is a never-ending experience. Teachers who listen to what students have to say, use good speech patterns, and provide opportunities for discussion will serve as models of good communicators.

Most teachers are knowledgeable about the interrelationship of the language skills. Loban's 1963 study concluded that children who are more proficient with oral language are also more successful in writing (7). Durkin found that children who read before coming to school enjoyed a family environment that included parents and siblings who talked with them and answered their questions (5).

Britton has indicated that young people talk to learn in several phases: from describing and explaining in small groups, they talk with the teacher to consider alternative explanations and how to verify them and finally they conduct an experiment, talking through each step (1).

Extensive opportunities for oral language occur naturally during the school day. Exchanges of greetings, introductions, and both casual and purposeful conversations are typical social responses. Students continually respond to questions and pose their own within the context of academic studies. Verbal interactions occur when small group or whole class discussions take place as various topics or procedures are considered. Oral reports are presented spontaneously and on a planned basis. These few examples of the natural uses of oral language can become effective tools for the classroom teacher in improving communication skills.

Teachers may devise classroom activities to accomplish their instructional goals through planned experiences, but studies have shown that the amount of structure is not as important to learning as the setting of clear instructional purposes (3). When children are involved in activities and their contributions are respected, the classroom atmosphere is wholesome, pleasant, and more conducive to the entire teaching-learning experience. Care must be taken that children's needs are identified and activities appropriately selected for the particular group of children being taught. If language is the medium for learning, then language skills should be integrated with other curriculum areas as needed and as naturally as possible, as in a unit approach to a topic. Specific activities with a view toward communication competence should be considered--activities in which the communicator is in a sense a problem solver who responds to given situations with appropriate behaviors that he or she alone controls.

## Framework for Learning

An effective environment for learning is one in which students have many opportunities to participate. Student interactions as both speaker and listener must play a significant role. Barbara Wood, among others, has compiled a framework for oral communication which teachers may use in designing appropriate instructional experiences. The components of this framework consist of the social competencies of young children, the five communication functions and four as-

pects of communication competence (8, 9, 10). Students at all levels should be given opportunities to practice the five communication functions of controlling, feeling, informing, ritualizing, and imagining. The controlling function is concerned with controlling types of behavior such as suggesting, persuading, or warning. Feeling consists of communication acts in which participants respond to feelings and attitudes such as blaming or exclaiming. Informing functions are communication acts of seeking or offering information. Questioning plays a vital role, as does explaining and demonstrating. Ritualizing serves to maintain social relationships in the form of greetings and taking turns. Finally imagining, as the fifth communication function, places participants in role-playing, dramatizing, and storytelling situations.

These five functions each cover large areas of activities. For example, under feeling would be found such acts as challenge, taunt, approval, congratulation, each with appropriate examples. For students using the communication function approach, four aspects to their tasks are: 1. to enlarge their repertoire of acts and to remain flexible, for the people, setting, the conversation, and purpose of communication will determine their appropriate response; 2. to judge effectiveness of the response they select given all the conditions above; 3. to carry out or implement skillfully the communication act selected in a variety of situations designed to improve their competence; and 4. to evaluate the interpersonal effectiveness of the total situation by giving students many opportunities for feedback from their peers so they can make judgment of their own and the work of others.

**Role Taking**

Role-taking situations are also recommended as an effective language activity (9, 10). Students assume a role and then interpret their part according to a character's age and personality. Verbal and nonverbal behavior can be observed, with class members deciding whether behavior appropriate for the situation and person was presented. Follow-up questions examine the range of responses, the selection of specific responses, and how well they were implemented.

Brown has discussed role-taking and the importance of the context in which communication takes place. He contends that to communicate well is to show awareness of and sensitivity to the situation. "This sensitivity is reflected in skill at role-taking, creating messages, responding to feedback, varying speaking style and using language to accomplish one's purpose."

Role-taking requires the ability to put oneself in the position of others and to see things from that perspective. Creating messages involves such skills as the ability to talk about topics of interest to others and to oneself, to keep to the point, to organize ideas and support them with examples, and to relate what is said to preceding remarks. Responding to feedback is the anticipation of other's responses and a willingness to adapt to them. To illustrate sensitivity by adapting one's style of speaking, Brown refers to the five communication styles described by Joos. Joos used the terms "intimate", "casual", "consultative", "formal" and "frozen" to describe the variety of styles an effective communicator might use (6). Brown's final subskill is "using language for a purpose".

**Interpersonal Interaction**

Continuing interpersonal interaction with individuals and in small and large groups leads to communication competence. There are innumerable opportunities to experiment with activities useful and important to students set in everyday situations. A strong emphasis on interaction helps to ensure that the skills practiced are current and useful. This currency will tend to link oral communication skills more closely to reading and writing and the content areas for students and will deal with real concerns about which they might have read, discussed, or reported on across the curriculum. Ideas and feelings can flow more readily when students, along with family and community members, have helped to formulate the direction of curriculum plans.

If interaction among children is significant to learning their roles as listener and speaker, then whole class or small group discussion takes on major importance. The teacher at times may serve as moderator or discussion leader and therefore must be a skillful leader of discussion. Children need direction to function effectively during discussion, learning to use the multiple skills involved. These include preparation skills for the topic to be discussed, listening, speaking, and thinking skills as well as the social skills which play an important part in the success of any group activity. Standards for discussion must be set with students, a clear purpose established, time for student preparation provided, and assistance given in improving questioning skills by offering relevant responses and sharing conversation. Discussion takes time, but issues across the curriculum can be dealt with while students receive direct practice in critical thinking skills and problem solving all of which demand interaction and use of effective oral language skills.

Interaction, whether one-to-one or on small or large group basis, usually involves questioning, and its importance is frequently cited by those involved in oral communication research. A careful sequence of questions can lead to discussion, and open-ended questions tend to be the best talk starters. One researcher, however, cautions against asking too many unnecessary or irrelevant questions and suggests instead that teachers make statements about the topic that students may respond to, which serve to involve the student and clarify what was said (4). Students should be encouraged to question each other to stimulate greater participation in discussions. Formulating questions with more precision, clarity, and relevance will increase students' effectiveness in oral communication and carry over to their written skills as well.

Finally, the pure fun of exploring ideas and words through word play, simulating argument, and creating drama should add a zest for language to many classrooms. The use of word games, locating synonyms and antonyms for common words, exploring sensory words and multiple meanings of words, and recognizing the impact of emotion-laden words will do much to enrich the students' vocabulary and help them to speak or write more effectively. Mini-debates on subjects of concern to the students can provide opportunity for organizing ideas, using propoganda techniques, and developing precision of language. Creative dramatics can provide for interaction and development of both speaking and listening skills.

**Summary**

Including language arts activities in classroom instruction does not ensure the learning of communication skills. It is essential that direct teaching of effective communication principles and opportunities for interaction be implemented in the process.

An activities approach to the teaching of oral language skills uses the activities previously mentioned as the focal point of instruction. Lessons and units are organized around practical experiences such as discussion, informal conversation, and debate as well as more artistic situations such as storytelling, creative dramatics, and choral speaking.

Others recommend having students master the skills of speaking and listening such as organizing ideas, using appropriate language, and speaking clearly. Still others would recommend a functional approach and would select activities to increase the students' repertoire of communication strategies as suggested in Woods's materials (9, 10).

An approach which centers instruction upon the student seems more effective than isolated social interactions. Common communication functions that are responses to everyday life situations are best selected from suggestions of students, family, or community members. A sensitivity to student communication needs is essential.

Participation of all students in the classroom should be encouraged, and they should be responsible for their own observations and evaluation of activities. Opportunities to practice both verbal and non-verbal strategies should be arranged for children, as adults frequently fail to develop these skills effectively. The chance to discuss real issues and concerns in planned discussion sessions, along with time for role playing and creative drama, will provide students with incentives for developing precision and variety in their oral language. Finally, the exploration of the language through word play and multiple meanings of words will bring enjoyment and an added awareness of language itself.

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***To what extent do activities such as the following facilitate achievement in speaking and writing: dictation, copying paragraphs from textbooks, teaching reading to students, and students reading "good" literature?***

Children tend to be motivated to try harder when they are engaged in pleasurable experiences. They frequently sustain their attempts for longer periods when they see meaning in what they do. Of the four activities noted in the question above, the most meaningful and pleasurable to children are the teaching of reading to students and student reading of literature. These two activities, unlike dictation or copying exercises, require that the learner interact in a meaningful way with text. It is the passive nature of copying and dictation which undercut their possible value.

There is little evidence that copying paragraphs from textbooks is a viable learning experience. This type of copying might be used to increase older students' recognition of the sense of "wholeness" found in the structure of a paragraph: if the sentences copied are then reviewed in order to see the "sense of the whole" that results from relating all sentences to a single topic or subject, then perhaps the time spent copying will be somewhat meaningful to students. Using paragraph structure to show sequence and organization for writing might also benefit the students' own writing. Yet, the major difficulty with copying and dictation exercises is that they are meaningless to students--they cannot see any direct relation to a real-life experience.

Children's desire to learn to read is well documented, and, of all the school subjects, parental expectations in this regard are most clear. They believe all children should learn to read, and therefore activities that enhance their children's opportunities to learn and increase their chances of learning to read are supported.

Callitri's strategy for teaching the language arts consists of four stages: "autistic, communicative, analytic, and aesthetic" (4). He suggests that at any of these stages, those experiences which are pleasing to the learner will tend to be repeated. In other words, children tend to return to and repeat experiences from which they derive satisfaction. Hearing prose and poetry, as well as other forms of writing read aloud, and reading of good literature are just such activities.

**The Teaching of Reading**

The interrelationship of reading, writing, and oral language is a solid one, and certainly skills gained for one will heavily influence the others. Graves speaks of

writing as the "making of reading" and of the young writer's need for knowing the sound/symbol relationships of reading (6). In addition, he sees the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic systems required in reading as also being used as the child writes. The child's writing in turn contributes to greater reading capabilities.

The teaching of word attack skills includes making phonetic and structural generalizations, understanding syllabication, using words in context, and using the dictionary. These offer help to children who are encountering unfamiliar words in their reading and in turn become tools when children encode their own spoken or written messages for others. The aural nature of the sound/symbol relationship also draws heavily upon the listening and speaking capabilities of children and thus reinforces skills in these areas.

There is much to be said for listening to stories and poetry read aloud within the process of teaching children to read, for the acquisition of vocabulary becomes more meaningful when heard in context and thus more useful when recalled for composing purposes. Research has specifically tied increased vocabulary and improved comprehension with programs of reading aloud. Cohen found that a planned program of activities following the reading of stories increased second graders' vocabulary and ability to comprehend. She concluded that oral language correlates with reading, and both can be improved by regular exposure to stories read aloud (5).

Applebee's research on children's developing perceptions of stories included study of the influence that facility with a story's language has on the reader's ability to predict, to gain meaning, and to enjoy reading (1). Teachers who wish to enhance their reading programs with opportunities for children to acquire greater sense of story, and thus greater facility in reading, can read aloud, tell stories, and follow stories with activities in which meaning, questions, and vocabulary are explored and extended. As a result, children who have strong story concepts are better able to retell, discuss, and create both oral and written stories.

The sense of audience that is acquired as students read a variety of forms of writing (stories, reports, essays, and letters) can be transferred to their oral and written compositions as they produce for self, teachers, peers, family, or a larger reading and listening audience (3). The objectivity required to transmit thoughts to others certainly can be strengthened by encountering this same objectivity in the writings of others.

The mere task of reading, which involves making meaning from print, utilizes the child's knowledge of punctuation, capitalization, spelling and grammar, and syntax. When reproducing their own ideas, young writers can draw heavily upon their reading experiences to more adequately use this knowledge. Studies are underway that are linking children's facility with sentence combining to reading comprehension (6). Certainly a reader, when attempting to write or communicate orally, has a distinct advantage over those who do not read. This leads us to a knowledge of literature as one source for improving reading, speaking, and writing abilities.

**The Role of Literature in Speaking and Writing Achievement**

The preceding section on reading has indicted that sense of story, vocabulary, and comprehension skills are enhanced by hearing stories read aloud or by reading

independently. The importance of using literature across the curriculum has long been advocated by Huck and other experts in the field of children's literature (7).

Children learn *from* literature as well as *about* literature. Listening to and/or reading prose and poetry can give children ideas and information that may serve as content for both speaking and writing experiences. Readers find that stories can also be exciting and enjoyable experiences which can motivate them to make an attempt to entertain others through their talk or writing. Information gained from stories can answer questions and broaden perspectives of readers and listeners in a way that will enhance their ability to discuss a topic or approach their writing with greater insight. Best of all, it inspires them to share this information with others. Children and adults may become interested in a story and want to share their excitement with others by either retelling or writing about the story. This need to communicate their delight encourages them to organize the story into some logical sequence of thought, usually following the plot structure, so that the listener or reader can fully appreciate the tale that is being shared.

Stewig advocates the use of good children's literature as a base for developing better student writing (8). He also urges teachers to read aloud and students to read independently as ways to immerse students in literature. Those students and teachers who know literature can then talk about it, reflect upon it, argue about it, and raise questions about it. Stewig suggests that children may become better writers by using the literature they hear and read as models upon which to build. He urges caution, however, not all stories should be followed with language experiences of an oral or written nature. Many should be enjoyed for their own sake, pondered, puzzled over, and stored away in memory for later recall at the child's leisure. There must be a balance between use and abuse of literature, and teachers must be sensitive to children's capabilities in this regard.

The publication of works by student writers helps children to view writing as a task that not just adults but they, too, can perform well. Young Author Conferences and workshops that have been conducted around the country in recent years offer proof of the motivating power of children seeing their own works "in print." Young people who write, design, and actually bind their own books are stimulated by the recognition they receive to make additional attempts at producing and improving their stories. Many of these conferences use literature as a model for student writing and include published authors and illustrators in their programs.

Today, when many children spend hours passively in front of a television set, perhaps one of the exciting contributions of literature is the response that arises at the close of most stories. Response takes many forms, but the two major ones are talk and writing. Britton talks of children taking the role of spectators--spectators who connect their experiences with those of someone in the story and who can re-enjoy their own experience each time they hear the story (2). Many children ask questions through a story to clarify their own thinking or to comment on something they personally can relate to. Discussions of stories help children to probe further into the author's intentions and provide an opportunity for them to share their enjoyment and understanding. Teachers can pick up many clues to the children's depth of comprehension during discussions that follow a story. Listen-

ing to children explain or retell a story provides significant information about their oral language facility as well as about their understanding of the content.

Children's written responses to books show that they adapt patterns from the stories themselves and pick up vocabulary and literary devices. Children who have not yet mastered the mechanics required to write can dictate their own stories or their responses to stories written by others. Seeing the teacher encode their words on paper helps strengthen their understanding of sound/symbol relationships and of the formation of letters. Stories or labels dictated to accompany children's pictures also reinforce their understanding of talk-to-print concepts.

It is common for children to dramatize stories they have read or heard read aloud. This active response provides an outlet for children's desire to become physically involved and also helps them sort out the sequence of events and appropriate beginnings and endings, which further strengthens their concept of story.

One additional advantage of the use of literature in the schools might be that of developing critical thinking skills. Discussion of stories, their characters, their plot structure, their forms, and the literary devices employed provides quantities of material for thought. The development of criteria upon which to base judgments about the quality of a particular story form or the use of a literary device can lead children to make intelligent decisions about the books they read. Comparing and contrasting stories of like theme or plot help young people become more knowledgeable about literary elements and their appropriate use. This improved understanding of literature can then be used when students produce their own stories.

**Summary**

To gain control over the use of any form of communication entails knowledge of the form. We have looked at activities with reading and literature that enhance young people's knowledge of form and content. The sharing of literature through drama, listening, discussion, and writing provides a vehicle by which both teachers and students are drawn into the processes that produce language. The literature they share will provide excellent models from which students can gain a sense of story and a more complete understanding of literary forms and devices. The students can, in turn, recall these understandings when they have a need or desire to use them.

The interrelationships that abound within the language arts components are mutually beneficial. For example, reading offers a model of correct spelling and sentence formation as well as word meaning in a context that will help students become more effective speakers and writers. Improvement in one skill such as listening will reinforce both speaking and writing. There is a constant interaction among the skills associated with speaking, listening, reading, and writing as they are applied across the school curriculum.

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## *COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM*

***The two chapters in this section look at oral and written communication from a cross-curricular perspective. Since all teachers ask students to speak, to listen, and to write, regardless of the subject matter, these skills can be taught and practiced across the curriculum.***

## *Is listening a matter of skill or motivation?*

Philosophers of language who are interested in the problem of how words refer to objects cite an interesting case from the history of astronomy. Early astronomers were particularly drawn to two bright stars. One was the first visible after sunset and was named the Evening Star. Another appeared just before sunrise and was accordingly called the Morning Star. Later astronomers, however, discovered that the Evening Star and the Morning Star were, in fact, the same heavenly body. It simply appears at different times in different parts of the sky. The astronomers discovered, in addition, that this heavenly body was not a star at all but rather the planet Venus. The philosophical issue: Do the expressions "Evening Star" and "Morning Star" have the same meaning since they, in fact, refer to the same celestial object? Are they meaningful expressions at all since their referent, Venus, is not a star? Did "Evening Star" and "Morning Star" express different meanings before the discovery of Venus?

When we discuss skill and motivation in listening we are, in some ways, like early astronomers unknowingly observing the planet Venus. Surely skill and motivation are properly regarded as different but congruent aspects of the phenomenon of listening.

We are all aware of listening in one respect or another, but it is important that we make our understanding of the listening process explicit. We do not want to mistake a planet for a star. For example, in our occasional frustrations with classroom behaviors that distract from learning, we are often prone to complain, "My students just don't listen." In these cases, "listening" is a buzzword that translates as courtesy, discipline, respect for authority. Listening instruction can certainly be a powerful tool that contributes to a positive learning environment. In fact, our desire to build a classroom climate which encourages respectful participation--interaction in which students build on the teacher's and each other's ideas--is a major motivation for working on listening skills. But it is not helpful to equate student listening skills with silent, obedient classrooms. There are many reasons why students may call out, disrupt, or stray away from the task at hand. Often students with classroom behavior problems are ones for whom material is pitched too high or too low. Or it may be that teachers with disruptive classes are giving unclear or contradictory instructions so that students have a hard time knowing what is expected of them. Sometimes, too, disruptive students are experiencing emotional turmoil which is beyond the teacher's legitimate control.

Some types of listening demand quiet, it is true. But other kinds of listening demand free questioning, discussion, interaction. The test of whether students in any particular classroom are effective listeners is not whether those students can remain silent. Rather, the test is whether students speak and act in a manner which is responsive to preceding talk. Listening as responsiveness, of course, presumes that things which invite response are said in classrooms. If the classroom climate is not rich with talk that respects the intellect and point of view of the students, no amount or technique of listening instruction can bear fruit.

**Purposes for Listening**

People can have a variety of responses to listening experiences:

- I was listening. I just didn't hear what you were saying.
- I don't understand what she said, but I sure enjoyed listening to her say it.
- I can't remember what she said exactly, but if we followed her kind of thinking we'd really be in trouble.

We can approach even identical spoken messages in several ways, depending on our purposes for listening. One purpose for listening may simply be to discriminate sounds. We might listen above the din of the classroom to hear if the teacher's footsteps are approaching, or we might listen to a child's speech to count the number of times he says "ain't" instead of "isn't." Another purpose is integrating information, usually in the context of following instructions. In this case we may be trying to get the gist of a message, transforming it almost immediately into usable concepts and discarding any specifics which are not of value (e.g., "I'll just take Highway 162 into town and then stop at a gas station to find Womack Road.").

Literal comprehension is quite a distinct purpose. Here the listener's intention is to absorb and retain as much information as possible. This is the kind of listening most often demanded when teachers lecture students about material which is likely to appear on a test. Empathic listening demands that we suspend our own feelings and reactions in order to sense those of another with whom we are speaking. To listen empathically we must withhold our automatic tendency to judge others and must be particularly attentive to the speaker's nonverbal cues. It is the kind of listening crucial to the development of human relations skills.

On the other hand, evaluation may be our deliberate purpose in listening. Critical listening allows us to distinguish fact from opinion, to weigh the relevance and credibility of information. Political messages, advertisements, arguments among friends all are opportunities for critical listening. Yet another distinct purpose for listening, often a precursor to critical listening, is inference making. In inferential listening, we go beyond the literal meaning of a message to discern a speaker's point of view. We form hypotheses about what that speaker might think about a different question or topic, or what that speaker might feel in a different situation. Finally, our purpose in listening may be purely aesthetic. Joby's father tells him a story and Joby listens, not because he wants to recall the story at some time in the future, not even because he wants to abstract from the story some lesson or moral, but simply for pleasure.

**Active Listening**

Sound waves impinge on us regardless of our express desires. Indeed, noise pollution can be a significant hazard to physical and mental health. But listening for any purpose demands an expenditure of cognitive effort. Listeners must actively screen out unwanted aural stimuli and selectively attend to their chosen stimulus. Moreover, the listener's mind can take in information at a faster rate than the speaker's mouth can broadcast words. Speakers typically produce about 150 words per minute. Listeners can effectively take in information at more than twice that speed (20). Therefore, even an attentive listener has a good deal of "spare time." Unless listeners use this time to keep themselves on task, they will inevitably be distracted. Effective listeners avoid distraction by reviewing what has been said, by anticipating upcoming material, or by synthesizing the message with background knowledge they already hold. Notetaking is sometimes also an aspect of active listening. Moreover, most listening takes place in the context of spontaneous interaction. That is, the roles of listener and speaker shift fluidly. In the context of interaction, an active listener frames and poses questions which will enhance information intake.

Another active listening behavior which takes place in all face-to-face communication situations is nonverbal feedback. Speakers are powerfully affected by their listeners' silent but visible responses. Yawns, frowns, shifting in seats, and sleeping are negative messages which listeners often project to speakers. Just as negative, and often quite unintentional, are neutral responses. It is really not possible to withhold communication; a blank expression is an expression nonetheless. Neutral messages are among the most devastating since they can engender uncertainty and defensiveness among speakers (8).

A listener has a responsibility toward a speaker just as surely as a speaker has a responsibility to the listener to be cogent, intelligible, and relevant. The listener's responsibility is to encourage (or at least to not discourage) effective communication. Nonverbal feedback behaviors such as nodding, smiling when appropriate, maintaining eye contact with the speaker, and perhaps assuming an eager posture (leaning forward and the like) do encourage effective communication in most interactions--including classroom interactions in which teachers are listening to students. It is useful to bear in mind that questioning skill and nonverbal feedback are essential components of listening skill, and that interactive listening is very often neglected in typical listening instruction and evaluation.

**Listening in Multiple Modes**

Speech is more than language. Nonverbal channels of communication-- posture, movement, touch, distance between participants, eye behavior, facial expression, voice quality, volume, tone of voice--contribute meaning to speech. Nonverbal cues may reinforce, contradict, modify, or even substitute for linguistic symbols. Read the following sentence:

I will try some new communication behaviors.

Now read it several more times, each time placing stress on a different word. Each recitation is essentially a different statement since changing word stress changes

meaning. When stress is placed on the word "try," for example, the statement communicates an expectation of failure. Some researchers believe that well over half of the meaning of a message is carried through nonverbal channels (2). Information about relationships between people is especially well suited to nonverbal transmission.

Listeners use nonverbal signals to check on how to interpret language. A constant diet of conflicting linguistic and nonverbal messages can be detrimental to mental health. For example, if Morgan runs to his mother flush with the excitement of completing a work of art, and Morgan's mother responds, "That's wonderful, dear," Morgan's enthusiasm for doing art is reinforced. But if Morgan's mother makes that same comment in a flat tone of voice while turning away to attend to some other task, Morgan is caught in a doublebind. He wants to believe the linguistically encoded message so as to receive positive reinforcement. On the other hand, his sense of reality tells him that the nonverbal message of noninterest is a more accurate indicator of reality. If he accepts the positive "stroke," he rejects reality. If he accepts reality, he denies himself positive affect. A constant environment of such crossed linguistic and nonverbal messages may be a leading cause of childhood schizophrenia (3).

Nonverbal cues come from many sources. Environmental context can be critical to interpreting a message. For example, Emily's demand, "I want the cooky," can be ambiguous or informative depending on how many different kinds of cookies are present. Joby's comment, "I like the picture of the ocean and I like the picture of the city, but I like that one best of all," is perfectly meaningful when only three pictures are visible to his listener. Even the physical layout of a classroom conveys a message to students. When students enter a room with desks neatly arranged in rows and the teacher's desk dominating the front of the room, their expectations of that class are quite different than when they enter a room with chairs arranged in a circle, teacher's desk off to one corner.

Television plays an ever increasing role in students' lives. It is easy to watch television in large measure because its rich nonverbal cues reduce the amount of imaginative effort which listeners need to expend. Television lures us because it requires less cognitive activity than other message sources (6). Educators are concerned about the effects of television *content* on children's values and behavior. Although there continues to be considerable dispute on this point, evidence does point to the fact that children who are exposed to a heavy diet of television violence seem to more readily accept violence as a means of resolving conflicts (11). Concern is also warranted because of the effects television *watching behavior* may exert on other aspects of children's lives. While children are viewing the screen, they are clearly not reading (at least not wholeheartedly), not relating to their peers, not exercising their bodies.

More subtle, but perhaps more profound, is the effect of television *codes* on children's style of information processing (19). Some primary grade teachers have noted that while the Sesame Street generation may know its alphabet better than their pre-Sesame predecessors, today's kindergarteners seem to have a much shorter attention span. The "grammar" that television uses to encode messages (cuts, fadeouts, framing, pace, etc.) can affect children's habitual modes of cog-

nition. It is worth noting, with reference to television viewing, that positive outcomes are most likely to accrue from this type of listening experience when children share it and discuss it with adults (6, 18).

In discussing nonverbal decoding, it is important to remember that just as language differs from speech community to speech community, so do the nature and meanings of nonverbal signs. Cultures differ, for example, in the meanings they assign to direct eye-to-eye contact. Middle class Anglos usually consider eye contact to be a sign of sincerity. Puerto Rican children, on the other hand, may learn that direct gaze is a sign of disrespect. This cross-cultural difference in interpreting the nonverbal code has resulted in more than one instance of undeserved punishment at school (9). Similarly, Native American children in the Pacific Northwest are used to communications environments which feature a good deal of physical proximity and tactile communication. They are typically reticent in formal classroom settings simply because the nonverbal cues tell them that this is not the situation in which talk is appropriate (15). Even the perceptually salient difference between the speech of black English speaking youngsters and their standard English speaking peers may be more due to nonverbal factors (rate and intonation) than to differences in language structure *per se*.

Finally, it is important that teachers, in particular, be keenly aware of nonverbal decoding. Students are sharply attuned, though not always consciously aware, of their teachers' nonverbal feedback. In fact, students sometimes react to nonverbal messages of such subtlety that we are unaware of the signals we are giving off--the side of the classroom on which we prefer to stand, the slight tension that compresses our lips when it is Mike's turn to read aloud, the number of times we touch Geraldo as compared to Nan. Teachers have expectations concerning students: who will be a strong student, who will just get by. There is strong reason to believe that we communicate those expectations to students via nonverbal cues. Students, listening to our nonverbal messages, come to fulfill those expectations, at times tragically undershooting their true aptitudes (16).

**A Complex of Cognitive Operations**

Recent research in reading skills has demonstrated that a grasp of the nature of reading requires an understanding of all aspects of human thought and even of the structure of knowledge in memory (1). Reading also clearly entails the whole of linguistic competence, and involves sensory processes as well. Although theorists have devoted far less attention to listening than to reading, listening skills are no less complex (12, 20).

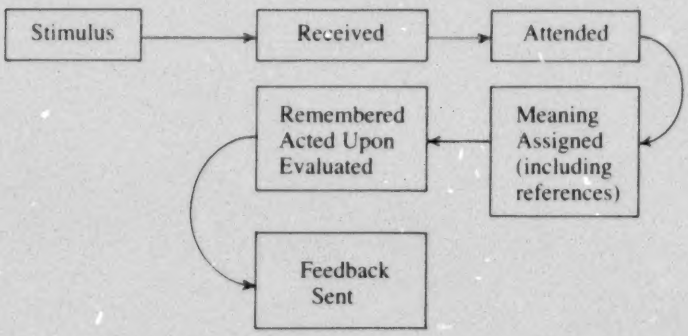
One major component of listening is comprised of physiological activity. Hearing requires acuity, auditory discrimination, analysis of speech sounds, and sequencing of speech sounds. Sounds which are heard do not necessarily enter into consciousness, and they must be held in short term memory awaiting the brain's "decision" to attend or not attend to them. Even this most fundamental level of listening is an impressive operation. Research on speech perception suggests that the brain itself contributes as much to recognizing a speech sound as do the sound waves emanating from a speaker's mouth. The brain supplies missing information, provides expectations against which only fragments of incoming sound need

be checked for verification, and can classify greatly divergent acoustic signals into the significant phonetic categories of a language (10).

Attending to a message is somewhat more of a deliberate process than merely hearing. It entails selecting relevant portions of the sound environment and "tracking" the message source. Once a message does enter attention, it is transformed into some kind of mental representation. The listener searches past experiences and ideas to find a match for the incoming message, some way to categorize or pigeonhole it. If a match can be found, then the listener understands the message in terms of those past experiences and preformed categories. This is similar to the operation Piaget terms "assimilation." Sometimes we need to distort a message in order to make it fit our system of concepts, our mental filing system. From time to time, we have so much difficulty making messages fit that we must revise the filing system. We have learned a new concept ("accommodation" in Piagetian nomenclature). Each of our concepts is interrelated and consequently each incoming message enters into a matrix of associations and relations with other information. We make inferences beyond the information given.

An illustration is in order at this point. Phillipe and Jacky are engaged in imaginative play. Phillipe says, "It's an alien from space," and Jacky both hears and attends to the message. Jacky observes the physical context and understands, first of all, that the subject of Phillipe's statement is a twisted wad of aluminum foil retrieved from the trash. Jacky mentally represents "it" as a piece of shiny trash. Jacky has a preconception of "alien from space." A space alien, according to Jacky, is a huge green or purple creature, hairy or scaly, which shoots laser beams and wants to destroy the earth. She has trouble fitting Phillipe's "it" into this category. Perhaps Jacky will dismiss Phillipe's comment, or even distort it to mean, "It belongs to an alien from space." Perhaps Jacky will decide that Phillipe is an ignoramus when it comes to space creatures.

Meanings, then, are constructed by listeners. They do not come prepackaged as part of the baggage of a word. The search for meaning, the drive to impose meaning on what others say, is part and parcel of the listening process.




***A Model of the Listening Process Adapted from Wolvin and Coakley (22)***

Beyond this construction of meaning, the listening process continues, branching out in diverse directions depending on the listening purpose. For example, if Jacky was listening to integrate information (follow directions), she would remember to ask for the space alien when she needed it in her play. If she was listening for empathy she might continue in a more affective flavor and conclude that Phillipe was very much involved in this imaginary drama.

**Listening Motivation Inseparable from Listening Skill**

The application of any skill depends on motivation. One might reasonably observe, "Hiram *could be* a good listener, but he never tries." It would be nonsensical to assert, "Hiram *is* a good listener, he just never tries." In other words, listening behavior has an internal locus of control. While teachers can provide the optimal climate for listening, students ultimately must learn to discover or create their own motivation.

Motivation is critical in all of the aspects of listening which we have discussed. Since listening is purposeful, an individual's motive for listening will determine the manner in which he or she listens. If I am a rabid football enthusiast, I will be motivated to listen in a critical way to a conversation touting soccer as the most exciting spectator sport. If, on the other hand, I am a soccer enthusiast, my motivation for listening might become aesthetic; how well the speaker captures the thrilling nature of soccer.

Since listening is active, motivation determines how effectively one listens. Listeners must work to select important stimuli and screen out extraneous ones. They must work to avoid distraction. They must concentrate on framing questions and on supplying feedback to the speaker. If listeners do not have an interest in listening effectively, surely they will not work very hard at the task.

The multimodal nature of listening likewise points to the importance of motivation. An effective listener must draw in and integrate information from linguistic channels as well as from a host of nonverbal channels. In listening critically to the message of some candidate for political office, for example, this weighing of one mode of communication against the other helps ensure a valid decision. It is easy for many voters to be taken in by a confidence-inspiring visage and a dynamic style of delivery. But a responsible citizen simultaneously attends to and evaluates the ideas that are encoded in the candidate's message.

Motivation influences many of the cognitive operations comprising listening behavior. It is interesting that the brain is connected to the inner ear by both afferent and efferent nerves -- signals travel in both directions (7). Thus, listeners can quite literally "tune in" a particular stimulus by conscious intention. Processes of attending, retrieving from memory, and creating new concepts all require some cognitive effort and thus are affected by motivation.

**Listening Is Teachable**

Much of the literature concerning listening is pedagogical literature (17). It describes how listening may be taught. In addition, research on listening warrants at least some degree of optimism about the outcomes of classroom intervention. Despite the short-term nature of many experimental listening programs, despite

unsophisticated measurement instruments which often fail to capture the uniqueness of decoding by ear, and despite rather arbitrary choices of what is to be included in listening lessons, the majority of studies in this area report detectable improvement in listening skills (20, 5). Typical units designed to improve listening skills provide exercises which highlight the various points we have discussed: listening is purposeful, active, requires information from both linguistic and nonverbal channels, includes several cognitive subskills, and is to a large extent a matter of motivation. A listening unit may single out particular barriers to effective listening such as stereotyping or jumping to premature conclusions. It may offer specific hints or gimmicks such as notetaking, making mental summaries, or guessing the speaker's point of view. At the elementary level, listening instruction often includes training in sound discrimination. At the secondary level, some lessons may help students recognize various propaganda strategies. Much of the efficacy of listening instruction, we suspect, may simply be a matter of sensitizing students to the importance of listening, more so than imparting particular listening techniques.

Teacher behaviors play a vital role in encouraging effective listening, even when there is no time set aside for deliberate instruction in listening. Teachers can model what it means to be an effective listener as they respond to student talk. Active listening can be demonstrated through appropriate nonverbal behaviors and through questioning which builds upon student talk. Teachers can respond in a variety of ways which indicate to students "I'm listening," and they can insist that other students do the same. One important kind of response reflects or paraphrases what the student has said; for example, "I can see you're really excited about the baby guppies you have at home" or "So you think that Othello was neither good or bad, but kind of amoral."

In addition to modeling, teachers can enhance students' listening by communicating with their classes in a manner that has high "listenability." Listenable messages, most obviously, treat their subjects in ways which the audience is likely to find interesting. Anecdotes, examples, personalized details contribute to listenability. Also, structural elements of talk like previewing, internal summaries, and explicit transitions from point to point help listeners. Adjusting the pacing, the amount of redundancy, and the amount of detail requires ongoing sensitivity to listener feedback. Effective teachers incorporate these aspects of listenability into their speech. As a result, their students listen well.

It is unfortunate that listening instruction is not more widespread. Listening is a basic skill that is instrumental for pragmatic reasons and for psychological well-being. It consumes an enormous amount of our day. It is amenable to classroom teaching. Most important, perhaps, deliberate instruction in listening is justified because people often listen rather poorly. One estimate based on a recall test places our listening efficiency at only 25 percent (4). In another study, only 28 percent of high school students could respond sensibly when a teacher stopped in the middle of a lecture and asked, "What was I talking about?" (Happily or unhappily, depending on your perspective, that figure was 90 percent among first-graders.) (13)

Listening instruction can have considerable payoff in other domains of instruction. With respect to writing instruction, for example, small group peer

interaction can be an effective method of organizing students for learning. Another composition teaching technique which involves considerable listening behavior is called "Talk/Write." (21) In Talk/Write, the writer works in close collaboration with a listener who provides feedback, asks questions which arise from the composition-in-progress, and suggests immediate revisions. Finally, one of the most meaningful ways to provide feedback to student writers is to allow them to *hear* their own writing. Students are very often extremely sensitive to their own word choice, arrangement, and even to mechanical errors when they hear themselves or their classmates read their work aloud. The sound of one's own writing seems to vividly supplement the impact of its sight.

Since motivation is inextricably bound up with listening skill, teachers need to find ways of helping students discover motivation for listening. Certainly the aesthetic motive is a strong one. Students of all ages enjoy oral interpretation of literature. Sometimes dramatization on audio recordings can be more compelling than film portrayals, since listening invites a greater investment of imagination. Teachers can help promote listening motivation by choosing materials of interest and challenge to students (14). In addition, teachers can allow students the freedom to choose their own purposes in listening to a variety of materials.

**Summary**

Listening is a matter of both skill and motivation. Listening is purposeful. We tune into messages differently if we are simply listening to discriminate sounds, as opposed to listening to absorb information or listening to identify a speaker's point of view. Listening is active. It requires an expenditure of effort. The skills of active listening include questioning and providing feedback. Listening is multimodal. Listeners decode verbal and nonverbal signals simultaneously. Part of the attraction of television is the richness of its nonverbal cues. But the effects of television viewing may extend beyond obvious behavior and attitude patterns to include our very habits of processing information. Nonverbal codes are sometimes culture-specific, and teachers need to exercise care in interpreting them. Teachers also need to be aware that they nonverbally communicate their expectations about students' aptitudes and that these messages may exert a profound influence on actual student achievement. Listening is a complex of cognitive operations. Even hearing at the primitive levels of sensation and attention is partially a matter of active engagement. Other cognitive operations which comprise listening involve categorizing and integrating information, and even creating new concepts. Motivation plays a role in each of these aspects of listening. Moreover, listening is teachable. Teachers can help students improve their listening skills by sensitizing them to the nature of listening and motivating them with regard to the importance of listening. In addition, teachers can model effective listening behaviors and themselves ensure that their talk is "listenable." Opportunities to practice and to improve listening skills occur throughout the day and can significantly enrich instruction in all areas.

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***How can oral communication be emphasized and implemented across the school curriculum? How can writing be emphasized and implemented across the school curriculum?***

In a very fundamental sense, the business of schools is communication, both in the aural/oral modes and in the reading/writing modes. Regardless of whether the teacher teaches science, music, math, or geography, he or she makes use of these communication modes to transmit knowledge to students and to receive information from students about how well or in what way that knowledge is being learned and applied. Since, therefore, all teachers use communication to educate children, all teachers need to be concerned about how children develop communication skills (5).

In elementary schools, which are organized around self-contained classrooms and in which one person is responsible for delivery of instruction, it is easier to implement cross-curricular programs which develop these communication skills. In middle schools and secondary schools where students study with several teachers every day, the implementation will require more coordination, but it can be done to good effect. Recent research into school processes suggests that successful schools are those in which all members of the school "community" (administrators, teachers, and parents) have agreed-upon goals and in which everyone is committed to furthering those goals (8). If schools are to foster the development of effective communication skills in children, then everyone with whom the child comes in contact will work to further this goal.

Before considering specific strategies for integrating oral and written communication across the curriculum, it will be useful to consider oral and written communication as a way for developing thinking skills and in relation to the teaching and learning process.

Just as writing is not speech written down, so internal speech--thinking--is not the internal aspect of external speech (4, 15). But it is still speech: thought connected with words. Piaget has noted that a child's perceptions and learning before he or she has learned to talk are based on sensory and motor data. After the child begins to talk, however, a new way of interacting with the environment opens up. As the child's language ability develops, so does the thinking process, so that an important step towards mature thinking is the child's ability to see things from another point of view (4).

Language, then, is inextricably tied to the thinking process. By providing an environment which is rich in language, the teacher can help the child develop thinking skills. Writing can be an important activity for helping children internalize information, organize experiences, and reflect on familiar objects from a new perspective. Moreover, writing can provide a useful means of helping children to externalize the often inchoate thoughts which form beliefs and attitudes, as well as providing opportunities for the child to demonstrate, hypothesize, test, or review a mass of information. This ability to use writing is especially important in solving problems where a way of schematizing, diagramming, or listing may help present a number of parts of a problem when relationships are not easily discerned.

Because of the intimate relationship between thought and communication, education is at one and the same time about thought (someone else's) and is delivered through language. When this language aspect is interactive among teachers, students, and text, learning is more complete. For example, the value of listening and writing--as when taking notes--has long been recognized by teachers and students. Similarly, teachers know that the use of visual aids, whether blackboard notes, pictures, or realia, helps students grasp difficult or complex ideas.

Moreover, oral and written communication provide important opportunities for the child to externalize thought. This externalizing has three fundamental values. It provides a method for evaluation of learning which can help teachers understand what and how the child learns; it allows the child to concretize and to synthesize his or her own understanding; and it allows the teacher and child to extend the learned material beyond the teacher's presentation. Many educators have realized that interactive communication permits both remediation and enrichment opportunities which are not possible in situations marked by one-way communication.

Oral and written communication, when linked to systematic approaches for extending thinking, can result in academic gains for all children (5). In earlier parts of this publication, several reasons for teaching oral and written communication have been presented (see pages 3-8, and 9-17). Most instruction is delivered orally, and children who are able to seek help do better both in school and in other aspects of their lives. By adopting a systematic approach to instruction and by developing higher level thinking skills through oral and written communication, we can provide children with tools for use now and later in their lives.

Bloom has created a taxonomy of learning objectives with which most educators are familiar (3). The levels of cognitive objectives include:

Knowledge
Comprehension
Application
Analysis
Synthesis
Evaluation

By designing writing and speaking tasks to encourage use of all six of these levels, teachers of all subjects in the school curriculum can ensure that material is learned, understood, and applied by students.

**Organizing Across the Elementary School Curriculum**

Because most elementary schools feature self-contained classrooms, it is relatively easy to implement instruction in oral and written communication across all parts of the curriculum. Especially in the early years, however, it is important that writing focus on the child's own experiences (4). Moffett feels that the first writing children do should be *expressive* (12). That is, it should center around the child's feelings. At this point, writing will be about experiences marked by immediacy. Initially, children will write about and for themselves. The audience and the writer will often be the same until, in Piaget's term, the child gradually becomes socialized and adapts to other people.

In these early stages, as later, children need opportunities for prewriting, drafting, revising, and final writing. From the very first days of school, oral language development can be based on art activities: drawing, painting, modeling with clay. For many children, these are exciting experiences that *require* comment. Encouraging children to talk about color, form, texture, and size will lead to discussions of interpretation of the art work and the relationship of the child's experiences in the art class to other experiences in and out of school. Moreover, as children develop fluency in writing, these art activities themselves may become prewriting or may provide nonliterate extensions of their writings.

Graves has pointed out that children are capable of writing much earlier than we had previously thought. Given as few as six consonants, children can be helped to write as early as first grade and even younger (2, 9, 10). These positive early experiences in writing will enable children to look forward to learning more about writing and about the conventions needed to let other people enjoy what has been written.

As children's skill in writing increases, and as other curriculum areas are introduced, writing can serve as another learning mode. When a child has learned that letters on a page have a relationship to sounds, then he or she will have made important progress in reading. A language experience approach to instruction capitalizes on the intertwining of the child's ability to speak and understand and the natural desire to read and write. Children come to school with between 2,500 and 4,000 words in their vocabulary (1) and control of most syntactic features of the language (7). If we accept the fundamental notion of "accepting the child wherever he or she is," then it seems foolish to operate reading classes only in the context of a basal reader which may have as few as 200 words (1, 6). This is not to suggest that basal readers should be abandoned. It is to suggest, however, that we have a responsibility to go beyond the basal and to encourage children to produce their own texts either by dictating them to teachers and aides, or by using tape recorders, or by giving children instruction in formation of letters when they want such instruction.

In short, the early elementary classroom can provide a language-rich environment. Children should have many opportunities each day to write, to draw, to speak, and to listen. Such time-honored practices as show and tell, storytelling, and raising one's hand before talking all teach children sensitivity to audience and communication situations. Frequent opportunities to practice communication skills--both as sender and receiver--will lead to communicative competence.

As children develop competence in writing, and as other subjects--arithmetic, social studies, science, and health--are added to the curriculum, communication skills can be used to expand the teaching and learning repertoires. Slavin and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins have developed a number of learning activities which are based on small group interactions (14). Their work has shown that children who are heterogeneously grouped (either by ability or race) participate eagerly in peer-tutoring, small group discussion, and intergroup competitions. The results show academic gains for all children as well as improved attitudes towards self and others. These activities have been used for instruction in arithmetic, social studies, and foreign languages, as well as spelling and reading. It is important to remember, however, that children require instruction in the communication skills and conventions which underlie these small group activities.

The "craft" literature is filled with other ideas for cross-curricular integration by means of oral and written communication. It is imperative, however, to remember that learning to write and to communicate orally is different from learning *through* writing and oral communication.

On the one hand, writing and oral communication skills should be taught and learned as important parts, in and of themselves, of the child's education. When the target of instruction is oral and written skill, students and teachers will be very conscious of the meaning of experience and the recording of that experience. When, however, oral communication or writing is being used for learning about other subjects, less direct attention will be paid to the vehicle. This will, of course, lead to an appreciation of the value of writing and oral language in numerous different situations. Taking notes, organizing lists of science facts, writing word problems in arithmetic, and writing stories all have different purposes, different audiences, and make different demands on the writer. Calling children's attention to these various kinds of writing will heighten children's awareness of purpose, audience, and will provide valuable insights into matters of style.

**Teaching Writing and Oral Communication Across the Middle and Secondary School Curriculum.**

As children grow, their control of language, of thought, of different kinds of writing, and their sensitivity to various communicative situations, mature (5, 11). The opportunity to foster a wide range of writing and oral language skills arises at the middle and secondary school level. If all teachers welcome this opportunity and accept the challenge of teaching language skills which are appropriate to the different subject areas, then the student's communicative development will continue. Many teachers, however, perceive themselves as ineffective writers and are, in consequence, reluctant to teach students to write, despite the fact that they give students writing assignments ranging in complexity from copying board notes to writing research reports or syntheses.

Therefore, before communication can be integrated across the curriculum, two things are required. First, teachers need to be convinced of the value of improving the students' communication skills. Second, teachers need to be confident of their own ability to teach writing and oral language skills. These goals can be accomplished in several ways. For a start, this book can be shared

with faculty colleagues who teach chemistry, history, P.E., and the other subjects. An organized inservice program, perhaps beginning as a series of informal conversations among various faculty members, can explore both the need for communications skills and activities for developing those skills.

A faculty study group might research the Bay Area Writing Project and the numerous programs that have been modeled on it. Essentially, the Bay Area Writing Project was founded on the belief that teachers themselves need to be taught how to write before they can teach others to write. A summer workshop is organized which sets up an environment in which teachers from all disciplines have the opportunity to explore their own writing and their attitudes towards writing.

Once faculty members have committed themselves to teaching in a way which encourages writing, they will be ready to analyze writing which is appropriate to their discipline. Most subjects have their own vocabulary or terminology which students are expected to learn and most texts present this vocabulary in two ways. First, the words appear in isolation--either at the beginning of a chapter or at the end. Then, the words are placed in context. This context may include a definition of the word, but does not always do so. However, these two presentations often are not sufficient. While some students will memorize the "dictionary" definition of the new words, many will not. In either case, however, the student very often does not "own" the word. It has not been internalized by the student.

One way in which teachers can reinforce the learning of new vocabulary is by asking students to use the new vocabulary orally in class. By using a model such as Bloom's taxonomy, questions can be posed for individual response or for discussion in small groups or whole class settings. These questions will naturally elicit the new vocabulary from students in such a way that the students will practice using these words in the context of other language already "owned" by the student.

Further, the use of questions from several levels of the taxonomy will ensure that students will begin to *think* about new applications of the words and concepts.

To show how this sequence of questions might work, consider this example: A history class has been studying the colonization of America in the seventeenth century. The following series of questions might be asked.

*Teacher:* *Can anybody remember one reason why people left England to come to America? Monica.*

*Monica:* *They came to America because the King of England wouldn't let them have freedom of religion.*

(The first question was on the "knowledge" level. To answer correctly, the student is asked to remember a fact and state it.)

*Teacher:* *Good answer, Monica. They came for religious freedom. Mark, can you give us an example of religious freedom?*

*Mark:* *Well, in England everybody had to worship in the same church, even if that's not what you believed. Nobody could choose.*

(Here, the teacher has moved to "comprehension." Can students state in

their own words or give an example of the abstraction under discussion?)

*Teacher:* *That's right. In countries where people don't have freedom of religion, everyone has to worship in the same religion, regardless of personal belief. Good explanation, Mark. Does everyone understand this idea? Okay. Let's write it on the blackboard. Now, Karen, do you think we have freedom of religion in this country now?*

*Karen:* *Yes.*

*Teacher:* *Can you explain why you think so?*

*Karen:* *Sure. There are lots of churches of all kinds right here in our town. Nobody has to go to any certain one.*

*Richard:* *Nobody even has to go to any church at all!*

*Teacher:* *Okay, good point, Richard, but hold on. Karen, who used to make people go to church?*

*Karen:* *The police, I guess. But now people have freedom of choice.*

*Teacher:* *Excellent. So, do you agree with Richard? Does freedom of religion include freedom to choose no religion?*

(Now the discussion has moved to "application": earlier knowledge is applied to a new situation. Notice that the teacher is doing several things in this exchange: he moves from specific placement of questions to a more general "Does everyone understand?" question. Then, in a few words, he writes the idea on the board as a reminder of the basic point of the discussion.

Then he moves back to assigning questions to specific students. First the student is asked to agree or disagree with the proposition. Then, the student is asked to apply the proposition in a new way.

Notice that the teacher accepts the interruption but doesn't reinforce too positively. Instead, he turns back to the original student to finish the discussion, although he brings the interruption in.)

*Teacher:* *If we think about this freedom of religion issue, we see that the King was assuming that he controlled every aspect of people's lives, right? How does the government feel about people today? How is our government different from the King? Sandy?*

*Sandy:* *I guess that our government doesn't tell people what to do.*

*Teacher:* *Our government doesn't tell people what to do. Yes, Richard?*

*Richard:* *Sure it does. We have to obey laws. The government tells us how fast to drive.*

*Sandy:* *Yes, but the government doesn't tell us what to believe about religion. That's not anyone else's business.*

*Teacher:* *Good discussion. So our government gets to make laws for the public good, but not in matters of conscience. Let's put those terms on the board.*

(Here we have moved to "analysis." The general principle of freedom of religion has come to stand for individual conscience, which our government does not regulate, as opposed to public good.)

*Teacher:* *Now, using what you've read about the laws of the King and from our discussion today, can anybody tell me how the colonists felt the government should be? Liz?*

*Liz:* *The colonists didn't want government or the King to tell people what to believe. That's not what laws are about. Laws are to help people get along with each other, but not to make us robots.*

*Teacher:* *That's very good, Liz! Did everybody hear that? Government is supposed to help us get along with each other, but cannot impose morality on us.*

(Here the student has "synthesized" specific applications and principles to form a general rule--a pattern--which has not specifically been taught.)

*Teacher:* *Okay now, everybody think. Which do you prefer? A government that makes laws about morality or a government that gives individual responsibility for moral decisions? One at a time. Go ahead, Bill.*

(Finally, a lively discussion can be expected, with everyone thinking in "evaluative" terms about these very complex ideas.)

While this systematic use of the taxonomy will provide a foundation for rich and varied oral language development activities, it will also enable the teacher to do a quick assessment of students' comprehension of the new material and may provide a prewriting experience which can be developed into written activities either as part of the in-class work or homework. Indeed, in the discussion which follows in the classroom, the relationship between oral language development and writing will often be tacit, but it remains an important pedagogical strategy which can bridge the gap between the teacher's (or text's) introduction of a concept and the student's ownership of it, as expressed in writing or thought.

One consequence of not providing practice opportunities with new vocabulary is that student's language often seems impoverished and their ideas seem compartmentalized (13). If we can overcome this compartmentalization, a student may learn the word "photosynthesis" in a science class, and he or she may find a new understanding of the effect of light on photographs in art class, and may use the word "photogenic" in an English class. Similarly, the concept of cycles has application in history, biology, botany, and sociology classes, although the examples of cycles will be as various as cycles of civilization, of animal life, of the nitrogen cycle, or the cycle of social development. The important point is that owning the vocabulary of a particular discipline often presents new ways of thinking about other disciplines.

Individual disciplines also have special conventions of writing, both in terms of what is written and how it is written. The scientific report differs greatly from the business letter, the literary essay, or the formal mathematical proof. Yet, all of these are examples of writing which can only be taught in the context of the discipline. If these styles and conventions are to be learned, they should be taught in the context which establishes the need. Rather than being willing to dismiss

writing as the special province (and problem) of the English department staff, every teacher needs to recognize the appropriateness of teaching that writing which is needed in his or her specialty area and which is part of its intellectual tradition.

As mentioned earlier, a cross-curricular writing emphasis may grow out of the faculty discussion and groups who were involved in planning for the inservice discussed above. A faculty committee may be charged with identifying congruences and divergences in writing needs from an interdisciplinary study of the general curriculum. But in whatever way such coordination is accomplished, it is the cornerstone on which the cross-curricular emphasis on writing and oral communication will rest.

## Summary

Because writing and oral communication skills are required for all areas of the curriculum, and because communication can help integrate apparently unrelated aspects of the total curriculum, it is important to emphasize the special communication conventions of each discipline. These conventions can be taught within the subject matter context. But teachers may require help in improving their own writing skills and in becoming aware of ways for integrating writing, speaking, and listening into their teaching. A possible model for this exists in the Bay Area Writing Project and related regional projects. This cross-curricular approach to communication will not only improve students' writing and speaking but will also help them to integrate and transfer learning from one context to another.

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## *LANGUAGE DIVERSITY*

***Language use is as individual as a set of fingerprints. Teachers can help children understand the effects of individual language differences on communication. They can also provide help to children for whom Standard English is not the native language or dialect.***

### *What can teachers do with non-English-speaking children in the classroom?*

Because so much of what happens in the classroom depends upon the communicative ability and skill of children, the child who is learning English as a second language needs special help to take part in classroom activities. The teacher in whose class the child is placed is in a good position to help the child maintain cognitive growth while acquiring skill in English. While the teacher recognizes that such a child needs extra help, he or she is often at a loss to know how to provide that help, especially in view of the fact that the teacher is simultaneously responsible for helping twenty-nine other children learn. What, then, can the teacher reasonably be expected to do and what can he or she do without depriving other children of the instruction they need?

Many school districts offer bilingual instruction to children for whom English is a second language. Individual school districts differ in their goals for and organization of bilingual instruction. Yet one goal common to all such programs is that normal cognitive development of children is not subordinated to a need to learn English. Bilingual instruction makes it possible, for example, for a six-year-old to begin learning to read in his or her own language. Simultaneously, he or she is learning English. Ultimately, the student will be able to read in *both* languages. While conflicting evidence as to the *superiority* of bilingual education has been reported, there is no evidence to support the well-intentioned fear that children educated bilingually will be confused by the experience or will exist in a linguistic "no-man's land." Indeed, it appears that many children in bilingual education enjoy enhanced self-concept and develop bilingual learning skills. Of course, many communities that do not have bilingual education in their schools do have children with limited English or no English language facility at all. How can teachers help these children learn?

Several factors will have a bearing on the choices open to the teacher. Is the classroom self-contained, or do students move to different places for instruction from different teachers? How old is the non-English-speaking child? Does the child know how to read in his or her first language? What are the additional personnel resources available to the teacher? Is there an ESL (English as a Second Language) specialist available? A classroom aide? Can a bilingual tutor be located and hired?

Simply because someone is immersed in a foreign language environment does not mean that he or she will develop competence in that language (10). Language

study needs to be organized, directed, and purposeful. However, having many opportunities--both formal and informal--to hear and use language will promote faster acquisition of the language than will fewer and exclusively academic occasions (3).

Because language operates in so many contexts, the learner needs a chance to be exposed to several opportunities. The child of limited English speaking ability should be encouraged to work in small groups, to listen and participate in peer-tutoring environments, to play team games, and to be as much a part of the class as possible (3). Indeed, language required and acquired in informal school activities is likely to be more important to the child--and thus more quickly learned--than is the language gained through direct instruction. Moreover, teacher-initiated inclusion of the linguistically different child will preclude segregation based on language difference.

When placing Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, some administrators assign them to classes two or three years below age level on the well-intentioned but false assumption that it will be easier for a twelve-year-old LEP child to learn the language used by nine-year-old Native English Speakers (NES). This is unfortunate for several reasons:

- The linguistic differences between the LEP and NES student are intensified by the physical and emotional developmental differences.
- The language of nine-year-olds is not markedly different from that of older children when measured as a total of language to be acquired. (9)
- The cognitive challenge of the third grade curriculum will not be stimulating to a twelve-year-old, who may become bored, frustrated, or develop a negative self-concept. (14)

Moreover, placement of LEP children with speech pathologists or reading specialists is inappropriate. The child's inability to speak English is in no way evidence of pathology or need for remediation. Therefore, these specialists are no better equipped to help an LEP student learn English than is a regular classroom teacher. In fact, it can be reasonably argued that increasing the case load of a reading specialist or speech therapist with an inappropriate placement takes time and energy away from those children who could benefit from the work of these specialists. For all these reasons, most specialists in second-language education recommend that LEP students be placed in regular classroom environments with their age peers.

### Creating a Supportive Environment for LEP Students

Several environmental factors can help LEP children acquire fluency in English. Many of these factors are directly controlled by the teacher. These include:

- Creating an environment rich in language and language-use opportunities. It has been pointed out elsewhere in this publication that *all* children will develop language skills better in school environments which provide daily practice in oral and written communication. This is especially true for LEP students. Not the least of the factors of this language-rich environment are the support and acceptance of individuals by the teacher, who should take whatever the child

brings to school: his or her talents, goals, ambitions, experiences. Work these into the child's daily round of activity. Rather than seeing an LEP child as a problem, welcome the opportunity to help all children learn about how different language systems operate to achieve effective communication (8, 13, 14).

- Encourage the LEP child to interact with other children. Assign peer tutors to the LEP child. Include him or her in small group activities. Encourage the LEP child to play games with other boys and girls. This is especially important for two reasons. First, children teach other children remarkably well. While you can teach your students of limited English proficiency the language of the classroom, only another child can teach him or her "child" talk. Moreover the desire to communicate with age peers is a powerful motivator for learning a second language (3, 8, 13). Second, LEP children very often develop self-segregation as a coping behavior. They hope that if they do not call attention to themselves then no one else will. Too often they are right. This self-segregation not only limits their linguistic growth, but it limits social and cognitive growth as well.
- Build success into the LEP student's school experience, as you do for every child. These successes will include active and supportive reinforcement for communication gains, but look beyond that: Is the child especially good at art projects or in some other subject area which is less linguistically dependent? When large numbers of Vietnamese children were enrolled in American schools, many teachers remarked the fact that they did very well in mathematics classes. Emphasize publicly those things which LEP students in your class are especially good at.
- Be sensitive to differences of behavior which are culturally founded. Remember that different cultures tolerate different behaviors. Navajo children are often considered passive or uninvolved in schools. This is a carrying out of a Navajo cultural norm which dictates that aggressive or assertive behavior is inappropriate for Navajo children. (6) Sex role differences in many cultures are much greater than they are among middle class Americans. Teachers need to be aware of these culturally dictated norms which are different from ones they expect (3). A major area in which many cultures differ from ours is in the relationship of parents to schools and the related notion of the "good" school. In many countries education is the job of schools, and parents play a minor role--although generally a supportive one--in the education of their children. If teachers want the active cooperation of these parents, it will be incumbent on the teacher to explain fairly precisely how the parent should interact with the school.
  Many cultural groups expect schools to be orderly, silent places in which teachers are the purveyors of knowledge. These expectations or ideals clash with more interactive, child-centered schools which are common in the U.S. Parents of LEP children need to be acquainted with the very different view of schools which is common in the U.S.

These, then, are four environmental factors which teachers control which will help LEP students to adjust to life in their new schools. Now, let's consider some pedagogical factors which will influence the way in which teachers can interact with LEP students.

**Supportive Teaching Strategies**

The first of these factors concerns textbooks and "native speaker competence." Native speaker competence means that every speaker of a language has an internal grammar which allows him or her to convey meaning through the language (8). This is a set of internal rules which the speaker knows are inviolate. Second language learners are at the very beginning of developing this internal grammar in the new language, although they obviously possess one for their first language. In fact, many language "errors" are directly attributable to a clash (called "interference" by linguists) between the first and second language. For example, a French speaker learning English might say: "This is my book. He is a novel." The apparently erroneous use of "he" as the pronoun to refer to "the book" stems from the fact that in French *livre* (meaning "book") is a masculine noun which requires the masculine pronoun *il*. Therefore, the French speaker generalizes a French rule of grammar (nouns and pronouns agree with respect to gender) to an English context which does not share this rule. However, interference seems to be a problem especially for children who are learning a second language which is not the language of their larger social milieu. Politizer and Ramirez found that interference was a problem for children who learned and used English chiefly in school, but not in their own communities (11).

Interference should not be confused with a phenomenon which linguists refer to as "code-switching." Sometimes speakers will begin a sentence in one language and finish it in another. Often, code switching is viewed by teachers as evidence of the speaker's deficiency in the second language. The switch is made, they think, because the speaker does not know the words in the second language needed to complete the thought. However, Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez have looked at code switching in several different ways (4). They explain that the minority language speaker often switches codes to signify group solidarity or for emotional impact in much the same way that people choose specific words because of the stylistic weight they have. Therefore, for Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, code switching indicates extreme sensitivity to the relationship between language and context.

Poplack undertook a study of code switching among Puerto Ricans living in New York and found that it occurs frequently in the speech of bilinguals and that it may represent a discourse mode (12). More importantly, perhaps, Poplack found that even among nonfluent bilinguals, the grammaticality of both languages is maintained in the switches. Code switching, then, is a mark of language knowledge, not a coping behavior designed to help get around a deficiency.

Related to the issue of native speaker competence is the issue of classroom materials. Textbooks, no matter how simply written, always assume native speaker competence. In choosing materials for the LEP child, then, the teacher will need to remember that while the regular textbooks will present a new learning situation to the LEP child, the book may require adaptation or glossing to ensure understanding. Discussing the text with the child will help him or her to associate the sounds of the words with their appearance and will help convey the cognitive content in another mode. Moreover, use of the texts which his or her classmates are using will help the child feel a part of the group.

Over the last twenty-five years, language educators and linguists have generally accepted interactive language-learning strategies as opposed to the grammar-translation methodologies which were popular earlier (5). Grammar translation attempted, by memorization of rules and the translation of "good" literature (often the Bible), to teach language by a kind of osmosis approach. While this methodology may have been useful for scholars who needed translation skills, it did not result in communicators who could speak and understand the oral/aural forms of the language they were learning.

Generally speaking, the order of presentation of language skills is listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Before a student can speak English, he or she must first hear it (2). By establishing a classroom rich in oral language--small group discussions, tape recorders, use of manipulatives and pictures, and storytelling activities--you will enable your LEP students to gain familiarity with the sounds of English. Mastery of these sounds (phonemes) is generally easier for young children (ages five to nine) than for older children (1). However, all children can be helped to learn to understand and produce the sounds of English. Remember that the goal is not to produce flawless pronunciation, but comprehensible pronunciation. Too much attention to phonology can be intimidating to ESL students, especially those older than age twelve who may find it very difficult indeed to master the English sound system.

More important than phonology is syntactic control of English. Understanding of and ability to use the structures of English is crucial if students are to learn to communicate. Despite its many syntactic irregularities, essential English syntax can be learned fairly quickly, especially given frequent opportunities to practice and to use the language in meaningful situations. The ESL text will also provide assistance in developing pattern practice exercises. These are exercises which focus on a particular pattern of language (forming negatives, sentences with Subject + "BE" + Complement) which speakers use frequently. While pattern practice alone will not lead to language acquisition, it is a good way to provide a basis which the non-English- speaking child will be able to use in a variety of communication situations (7).

If your school does not have ESL texts, it is still possible to help the LEP child learn English as a second language by relying on an adaptation of the language-experience process. Let the child write his or her own texts, or you take dictation from the child. This will allow you to introduce language structures and vocabulary as he or she feels a need for them. If, in addition, you want guidance for language lessons which are more focused, you might obtain a basic ESL text and use the organizational model which it provides for determining which features of the language to introduce in what order.

If your school has an ESL or bilingual education specialist, a mutually reinforcing relationship between the two of you will result in gains for the LEP child. Not only will the ESL specialist be able to recommend texts and strategies for you to use, but he or she will be able to create ESL lessons which will reinforce the learning in science, math, history, and other subjects you are teaching.

This is important since the child's cognitive development should continue as normally as possible while English is being learned (15). For example, a six-year-

old Spanish speaker will have a very difficult time learning to read from an English language basal reader. But the child *wants* to learn to read. What should you do? You will have difficulty teaching sound/symbol correspondences to this child since the correspondences are different in English from Spanish. Do you refuse to allow the child to read, even though you recognize the child's motivation? Again, a language experience approach to reading may provide a solution to this problem, as can a concerted, coordinated effort by you and the ESL specialist.

Of course, the problem of continued cognitive growth is especially important for older students. Not only is language learning more difficult for them, but they feel extra pressure to get through school and on to college or into a job. In these cases, the reinforcement of cognitive learning which the ESL specialist can provide in language activities is very important.

Another way in which you can help ESL students is by modeling language. Repetition of words and structures used in a natural way and accompanied by appropriate gestures or with visual stimuli can be very helpful for ESL students. Avoid sentences like "Hand me that thing." Say the thing's name and point to it. Such language use should be natural and spoken in a normal tone of voice. Remember that the ESL student is not hard of hearing. Shouting will not increase the speed of language acquisition, nor will exaggerated pronunciation. If anything, this will demean the student in his or her own eyes and in the eyes of classmates.

Two final factors can be added to our inventory of ways to help LEP students. These are attitudinal.

- Remember that communication competence is more important than good grammar in the textbook sense. Respond enthusiastically and appropriately to the child's uses of language. Be careful to respond without judging the "grammar." When you do correct, focus on one area of structure at a time and provide appropriate models.
- Respect the child's native language. Do not take it upon yourself to "re-name" the child with an English noun, do not laugh at his native language nor permit other students to do so, and do not force a child to choose between a first and second language. Language acquisition, especially of a second language, is hard work, but it need not be painful for you or for the students.

**Summary**

Children whose native language is not English need direct help to acquire competence in the language of public school instruction. Although they will not learn English *solely* by immersion, their best opportunities for learning both language and subject matter occur when they communicate with English-speaking peers. Peer tutoring and group interaction are also important for an effective learning situation. Textbooks, even at the basal level, which are designed for native English-speaking children require modification and careful use. Teachers should seek out texts expressly tailored to the needs of these students and may allow them to generate their own reading material through an adaptation of language experience approaches in which children engage in dictation. Teachers of LEP students will need to be sensitive to both interference from the student's native language

as well as to differing cultural expectations about appropriate school demeanor. In working with second language learning, teachers can be most helpful when they provide good models and rich English language environments, and when they recognize that instilling communicative competence is more important than aiming for error-free speech in a grammar book sense. Finally, teachers should capitalize on the talents and abilities of LEP students and should at all times demonstrate respect for the child's native language and culture.

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***How can teachers help students to understand the language differences of various audiences?***

Learning to communicate effectively, whether in writing or in speech, is very much like learning to be a good cook. No matter how little I, as a novice cook, know about the art of cooking itself, I do know about food; I've been eating all my life. I have definite likes and dislikes as regards food. I prefer broccoli to string beans. I have a sense that the same food can be prepared in a variety of ways; that is, chicken can be fried, baked, broiled, or boiled. I know that some foods can be combined (spinach with cream sauces) but others cannot (raspberries with beets). I also know that sometimes I want a light meal and at other times I want something heavy. All of this knowledge I bring to the cooking class with me.

But I am still in a class. So another thing I know is that the instructor knows some things that I do not know but will teach me, and that the instructor's experience and skills will broaden my own. I also know, of course, that the instructor will respect the knowledge and attitude I bring to the class: If all the instructor is willing to teach me is how to cook string beans, and I hate string beans, I will quickly lose interest in the class.

Similarly, children of all ages know quite a lot about effective means of communicating. Children do, after all, teach themselves to talk rather independently of adult interference. But in order to help children improve their communicative effectiveness, which includes framing messages which reflect purpose, situational appropriateness, and awareness of audience, we will need to understand two aspects of language: dialect and style.

**Dialect**

In a general sense, dialect refers to any variety of language shared by a group of speakers. Usually these varieties of language correspond to other differences: geography, race, or social class, for example. In this sense, dialect is not a judgmental term, since linguists reject the notion that one dialect is more logical, more elegant, or more correct than another. Everyone speaks some dialect of a language (13).

For every language there is a standard dialect which is the form commonly used by the socially prestigious class or group. Sometimes this standard is referred to as the speech and writing of the best-educated users of the language. Since education and social prestige are generally correlated, these two definitions are probably synonymous (10). The important points to note, however, are that the

standard form is a dialect and that, objectively, it has no more claim to "rightness" than does any related dialect.

Dialects, of course, do not exist in isolation from one another, nor is language static. When dialects exist side by side, interchange can occur if members of the two dialect groups interact (5). Of course, since one group is generally seen by *both* groups as using the "more correct" form of the language, it is likely that the low prestige group will resist the "approved" dialect as being "snooty" or "stuffy" and that the high prestige group will reject the other dialect as "lazy" or "sloppy."

Nevertheless, languages and dialects are in a constant state of change. The ultimate description of a language can only be written when no one uses the language for communication; when it has become an historical oddity. Until that point is reached, language remains dynamic, often "elevating" formerly "ungrammatical" forms to a level of wide acceptance. A recent example of such change in standard American English is the loss of the contrast of meaning between "I shall" and "I will."

Dialects differ on several linguistic levels (12). The most obvious of these is pronunciation, which is usually a characteristic of region. Other levels on which differences occur include the lexical and the syntactic. In Appalachia, people often use the noun "poke" to signify what Southerners and Midlanders use "sack" to mean. Structurally, "be" is meaningful in Black English when describing a customary state: "My father be sick (7)." While this utterance may be frowned upon by many people as exhibiting "bad grammar," it is a characteristic structure of a particular dialect of English. To notice this statement when a child makes it and then to infer that the child is not intelligent is, at best, to make an erroneous inference and, at worst, may result in a communication breakdown between speaker (the child) and audience (the teacher).

The differences among various dialects of English are relatively minor and affect relatively few language features (12). Generally, the differences do not impair the abilities of people from different dialect backgrounds to understand one another.

But dialectal differences do lead to perception of, and often judgments about, the group which uses a particular dialect. Whether you perceive the dialect as "right" or "wrong" largely depends upon whether you perceive the user group as right or wrong (9). In writing, dialectal variations are often inappropriate since so much of writing is outside of a context wherein dialect becomes an important issue. However, in creative writing, dialect may be important for helping establish character, setting, and context. Think, for example, of the use of dialect by Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Joel Chandler Harris, Bret Harte, and other "regional" writers.

One way in which teachers can help children to develop sensitivity towards different audiences and dialects is to involve the class in a study of dialects and dialect differences (13). Such a study might involve tape recording natural speech samples from a variety of speakers in a variety of situations. Each sample should be catalogued with information about the speaker (age, gender, race, level of education, profession); about the communicative situation or act (giving directions,

asking and answering information questions, social interaction of peers); and about the audience (age, gender, race, profession). Comparison of language use differences in a variety of these interviews, especially if one person provides several samples, will clearly demonstrate implementations of choices of language.

For young children, the activity of tape recording one another in class, on the playground, at lunch, and at home will yield exciting personal information which can later be the basis for writing activities and instruction in social studies as well as the language arts.

**Style**

Many of the choices of language use people make are dependent upon the situation in which communication occurs. Joos, in his classic work, *The Five Clocks* (6), discusses five styles of language use which are rooted in the communication situation:

- Intimate Style: This requires no inclusion of background information and uses jargon, a "special" language, meaningful only to the intimate group.
- Casual Style: This is for friends, insiders. It is marked by the use of slang and ellipsis. On the one hand, slang indicates that the insiders will understand the special use of language, while elipsis (the absence of certain words) supposes that users of casual style are well-enough acquainted to understand "without words."
- Consultative Style: In this style, the speaker supplies background information, and the addressee participates continuously. This is a very common classroom style.
- Formal Style: This style informs. The addressee does not participate. Conversations among strangers begin in formal style, and classroom lectures are delivered in formal style.
- Frozen Style: This is the style most often seen in print. The language is accessible, but the addressee cannot ask questions and is not known, in a real way, to the sender.

Most classroom interactions use either the casual, consultative, or, to a lesser degree, the formal style. Lloyd-Jones (9) has pointed out that Joos's styles of language are based on indicators of social interaction. Intimate style is almost always oral but is rare in frequency since few of us maintain a large number of contacts of appropriate intensity with others. Casual style in writing occurs only in letters to close friends. Formal style indicates a reduced interaction between speaker-listener (as in lectures) or in most written forms. Joos's analysis has been included here, though, since it offers another way to look at linguistic interaction and provides a model for student analysis of language.

Helping children realize that they almost instinctively use different styles of language in different environments will help them become aware of the fact that they can choose among several possible language strategies to find ones appropriate to a specific audience and interaction. Pointing out differences between playground talk and classroom talk, between talk with parents and talk with siblings, talk with the principal and talk to the teacher will assist this growing sensitivity to options.

Related to Joos's description of style is the distinction made by Basil Bernstein between "elaborated code" and "restricted code" (1). Bernstein's concept of codes rests on the idea that the closer the identification of speakers and the greater the range of shared interest, the more probable it is that speech will take a specific form. Thus, fewer words and structures need to be spoken (or written) if the speaker and listener know each other and the communication context well, while interchanges between strangers in a context relatively unknown to them will require more elaborated verbal activity. For example, a mother and child might have the following exchange when the child sets a glass full of milk on the edge of the table:

*Mother: Margaret! (Spoken emphatically, with chin raised.)*
*Child: (Looks toward Mother.)*
*Mother: Your glass.*
*Child: Oh. (Moves glass away from the edge.)*
*If the child knocks the glass over, the mother might add:*
*Mother: I told you what would happen.*

Clearly, the code used is restricted, but the meaning of the exchange is clear both to Margaret and to her mother. (It is clear to us too, largely because we have found ourselves in similar situations, either in the Margaret role or the Mother role.)

If Margaret or her mother were to retell the incident to another person, a much more elaborated code might be used:

*Margaret (to a friend): Mommy got mad at me this morning.*
*Friend: Why? What happened?*
*Margaret: I was drinking a glass of milk and I set it down right on the edge of the table. But I had to, the table was covered with the newspaper, etc.*

In this exchange, the speech is not tied to the *reported* context but to a new context which requires that meanings become explicit, elaborated, and individualized. Elaboration involves the speakers in particular role relationships and (to use Bernstein's words) "if you cannot manage the role, you cannot produce the appropriate speech." In elaborated code contexts, it is the difference between the speaker and audience that is essential, while consensus lies at the base of the relationship where restricted codes are appropriate.

This concept has interesting application in classrooms. Children who have been reared in environments where they have little opportunity for interaction with many different people may have difficulty in managing roles requiring elaborated speech. An important contribution of the preschool experience to child development is precisely this help in learning to interact with others so that role elaboration becomes easier. Similarly, games and activities requiring role playing or "make believe" stimulate children's ability to use elaborated code.

The decision to elaborate, of course, is an indication of the child's growing sensitivity to the need of the audience for a great deal more information about the topic under discussion. The need for more elaborated code grows in direct proportion to the audience's distance from knowledge of the event (2, 3). Britton and his colleagues point out that young children write largely in an expressive way

(3). By expressive, Britton means language which is reflective of the speaker or writer and of shared contexts of meaning between writer and reader. Expressive writing, then, is not highly explanatory; the writer (if he or she is aware of audience) assumes shared understanding by the reader. Children will find it helpful, as they develop elaborating skill, to work with and speak with people who are removed from the immediate situation. Class visitors need more information about a classroom activity than will the classroom teacher. When developing children's discussion skills in small groups, it will be useful to allow children to report a summary of the small group's conversation to the whole class. Writing to pen pals, sending letters to parents, interacting with children from other classrooms, and reporting classroom occurrences to children who have been absent are all ways in which the teacher can help students acquire skill at managing roles which require differing degrees of elaboration.

It is important for the classroom teacher to remember that children who have difficulty in using elaborated code are neither nonverbal, "linguistically deprived," nor less intelligent than other children (7). Skill at elaboration is dependent upon communication experience, experience in assuming various roles. In the language-rich, highly interactive, meaning-based environment which current pedagogical research advocates, children will be given many opportunities to practice taking roles which will help them to learn when or to what degree restricted codes or more elaborated codes will be appropriate.

One final issue needs to be considered when discussing the development of sensitivity to various audiences. This issue is the use of pejorative, racist, or sexist language. This is especially important because the model provided by the teacher will very often determine the attitudes -- good or bad -- developed by the child towards language, towards other people, and towards school. Brophy and Good report a number of observational studies of teacher-student interactions which show that the quality of instruction provided students correlates with teachers' perceptions of student ability. Often these perceptions are influenced by race and gender. Not only does the quality of instruction decline for students of race and gender different from the teacher's, but the amount of learning by these students decreases (4). The difficulty of discussing these issues is compounded by individual disagreements as to the relative degrees of importance of avoiding pejorative, racist, and sexist language and as to their definitions.

The vast majority of educators will not tolerate the use of scatological language in schools. We may use such language ourselves outside of school, and we may know that some students use such language. We may accept the fact that swear words (or "dirty" words or cursing) are more or less acceptable among different language groups. But, by and large, we consider such language inappropriate and unacceptable in classrooms.

Racist and pejorative language are often not as easily recognized or agreed upon. We do not permit students to hurl racial epithets at one another, but we may smile tolerantly when a Polish (or Jewish, or Mexican, or whatever) joke is told. This acceptance sends a very clear message to children: this language is okay, and the individuals ridiculed by it are less valuable than are other people.

Probably because our attitudes toward the two sexes are being re-examined by

many of us, a definition of sexist language is at the same time less clear-cut and less generally shared (11). It is becoming, for example, much more common to hear people using the extended "him or her" or "he or she" when using pronouns. But other instances of sexist language (use of "fireman" in lieu of "firefighter" or the generalized "the doctor...he; the teacher...she") still occur with regularity in many people's language. Research has shown that use of sexist language affects the ways in which we think about others and ourselves (11).

Controversies of this nature are appropriate for study by children in the middle and upper grades (4-12) and will increase their sensitivity to language use by others. While young children will have difficulty with the abstract nature of such discussion, they will pick up attitudes and values from classmates and teachers and will exhibit these through their use of language and communication interaction. Moreover, some researchers have identified language patterns which they claim reinforce masculine or feminine stereotypes (11). For example, the tag question ("The Russians ought to stop influencing Poland, shouldn't they?") is considered "female language" since it is less assertive than a flat statement (8).

**Summary**

Very young writers usually employ "expressive" writing, that is, writing which is more reflective of the speaker's need to communicate than of the reader's need for information. As young writers mature, they become more sensitive to the situational and functional aspects of writing and to audience. Britton and others point out that most school-based writing is addressed to the teachers, but as writers mature, they learn to consider the audience. It requires some imagination on the part of teachers to construct writing activities which establish communication with unknown readers.

The problem of developing sensitivity to language differences among audiences is compounded by the fact that student writers themselves have varying degrees of language sophistication. Work by Loban, Bernstein, Wolfram, and others suggests that language use and socioeconomic status are closely linked. One implication of this for classroom teachers is the need to provide a variety of activities to help all children become more conscious of their own language and to become more fluent users of language.

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# *EVALUATING COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING*

***Feedback is critical in effective communication. Teacher, self-, and peer-evaluation of oral and written communication are all essential if skills will continue to develop. Moreover, evaluation can help the teacher understand which instructional events were especially helpful and can help in the planning of instruction.***

## *How can teachers evaluate speaking and listening skills?*

Face-to-face communication is risky. When you speak, you are aware that your audience is not only weighing your message but also judging you as a person. If you say something foolish, there is no way to call it back after it leaves your lips. Though you may try to mitigate the effects of your words, communication is not reversible. A formidable consideration, especially in formal speaking situations, is that your physical being is exposed during face-to-face interaction, and all of us share insecurities about that kind of vulnerability. Even listening also entails risks under many circumstances. We seek to avoid hearing messages which are likely to contradict our deeply held beliefs, our life-style commitments. To listen is also to risk misunderstanding.

In order to surmount these risks, in order to plunge into an act of communication, we must perceive possible rewards: the opportunity for self-expression, the opportunity to strengthen a bond, the opportunity to influence another, the opportunity to assert one's identity. In spite of the risks, humans are communicating animals. Community is at the heart of the human condition.

A communicator may engage in interaction for a variety of purposes. A communicator does not, however, ordinarily assume the risk of interaction so that he or she may be evaluated. (At least we cannot expect normal communication under those circumstances.) Communication does not thrive in a climate of evaluation, which frequently engenders defensive reactions in speakers and listeners--withdrawal, belligerence, or distortion (11). Many communication tasks bring forth high levels of situation-specific anxiety. On top of that, a large minority of individuals experience generalized anxiety about speaking and listening as a personality trait that operates in all or most situations (18, 8). Therefore teachers must be extremely cautious in subjecting students to oral communication assessment.

On the other hand, evaluation can serve some distinctly positive functions. Some of these pertain to evaluation on the level of school-wide or district-wide instructional programs. Although it is not ideal to impose educational innovation by testing, one of the benefits of large scale assessment of oral communication skills is that assessment programs of this type can legitimize speaking and listening instruction. Loban observes that "the language arts curriculum inevitably shrinks or expands to the boundaries of what is evaluated" (14). Skills which are tested tend to get taught. Indeed, one reason for the neglect of oral communication instruction in American public schools is the lack of appropriate measurement

technology. In Great Britain, though, instruction in speaking and listening was boosted by the introduction in the mid-1960s of an oral communication component of the Certificate of Secondary Education examination (28).

Large scale assessment of speaking and listening skills, however, is best kept distinct from less formal, less standardized evaluations of students' speaking and listening in classroom situations. Their methods differ, as do their aims. For discussions of large scale measurement in this skill domain, see Mead (19); Brown *et al.* (3); Plattor *et al.* (21), Stiggins (27), and Rubin, *et al.* (24). The discussion in this chapter will be restricted to the concerns of classroom teachers interested in evaluating the on-going progress of individual students in oral communication proficiency.

**Purposes for Oral Communication Evaluation**

One function of classroom evaluation in oral communication is to provide feedback to teachers. If a teacher is concerned with students' abilities to relate ideas logically in speech or to discern a point of view in listening, then some form of systematic observation can inform the teacher about the effectiveness of prior instruction. If the results suggest that students have not yet integrated this instruction, then the teacher can alter subsequent lesson plans. Without this sort of feedback, teachers are shackled to sequencing and time allocation plans which they most often develop in the weeks before classes have even begun, before the unique chemistry among students and between teacher and students can be anticipated.

Another benefit of evaluating speaking and listening skills also aids the teacher in instructional management. By evaluating students' communication skills, teachers can diagnose individual student's strengths and weaknesses to better place them in instructional sequences. For example, if one student demonstrates proficiency in providing background and sequencing in a talk about how seeds germinate, that student may be ready to advance to dealing with more abstract rhetorical problems such as organizing a discussion about how computers may affect daily life in ten years. If another student, on the other hand, has difficulty describing the sequence of seed germination, then he or she might profit from additional experiences in storytelling which cultivate a sense of sequence and setting. Similarly, if a student has a hard time in answering questions about a speaker's point of view, that student is probably not yet ready for extensive work in empathic or critical listening. Such a student should be provided with additional practice in listening to speakers who share a background more similar to the student's own perspective.

Using evaluation for purposes of diagnosis and placement in instructional sequences carries with it the flavor of mastery learning and criterion-referenced testing. The teacher assumes that all students are capable of progressing in oral communication competency and that students *will* progress if they are exposed to the proper learning experiences in the proper order. This assumption demands from teachers a fine sense of the learner's capabilities and needs. It does not demand, however, that communication skills be taught in isolated bits for example, with students practicing enunciation drills before they are permitted to give a talk

to the class. Communication emerges holistically, as the simultaneous and symbiotic interplay of many subskills. In virtually all cases, enunciation drills can be dispensed with in favor of activities which invite students to carefully enunciate in the context of purposeful talk.

Furthermore, using evaluation for diagnosis and placement requires a direct match between testing and instruction. Evaluation criteria should be determined by the skills in which students actually receive instructional practice. If empathic listening is tested, then empathic listening must appear in the curriculum and in the classroom.

Most important to students' continued development of communication competence is feedback which enables them to expand their repertoires of communication acts, to refine their criteria for selecting situationally appropriate strategies, and to consolidate their skills in implementing communication strategies. Speech is a fast-fading medium; it leaves no physical trace which can be reviewed. So speakers and listeners experience difficulty in accurately monitoring their own behaviors. Viewed in this light, evaluation is no less than an essential component in the process of becoming an effective communicator.

Feedback which best contributes to development of communication competence is feedback which provides students with concrete information about the *effects* of their speaking and listening behaviors. Some important corollaries follow from this principle. First, teachers need to respond as audience members, albeit as audience members with special training in critical observation. It is not contradictory to recommend that evaluation be cast in descriptive language. Instead of comments like "vague language," a teacher might comment, "I didn't know what you meant when you kept mentioning 'that thing on the top.' I suspect that your other listeners also had problems with those kinds of expressions." Or, instead of saying, "You spoke too softly," a teacher might respond, "I had trouble hearing your comments in our discussion. I really had to strain. I must admit that with all the other discussion going on, it made it hard for me to give your suggestions as much weight as I had wanted."

The teacher, of course, is not the only member of the audience; perhaps not the most important, either. Peer evaluation should be fully exploited. Often peer comments will be more meaningful to a student than the teacher's. Note, however, that students require a vocabulary for talking about communication, and this language about language will only be cultivated though deliberate classroom instruction. Videotape also provides a resource for self-evaluation. Particularly in the context of group discussion, reviewing a videotape with other participants can supply students with insight into their communication behaviors that isolated teacher and peer comments cannot approximate.

Feedback which concretely conveys the *results* of a student's communication is the most helpful of all. Such feedback can come in a variety of forms. For example, if a child tells a story, useful feedback could come in the form of pictures drawn by other classmates which visually retell the story. Or if a student is describing an object or explaining a procedure, he or she can see if the listeners were able to identify the proper object or perform the proper procedure (4). In the case of listening assessment, teachers can employ similar tactics. Can the student ac-

curately follow the spoken directions for drawing a cartoon figure? Can he or she pass the message on to the next student without distorting it? Especially in the case of young children, however, teachers should not assume that students will necessarily comprehend the implications of this kind of concrete feedback. Young children cannot perceive that their communication has not always been successful, and message sources have a tendency to blame receivers exclusively for communication failures (2, 22).

**Contexts for Oral Communication Evaluation**

It is immediately apparent that not all of children's communication should be evaluated in a formal manner. Nor would it be possible to do so, even if it were desirable, if teachers embrace a mode of instruction which offers frequent opportunities for student interaction. Although students learn from appropriate evaluation, evaluated performances should not be their only opportunities for practicing communication skills. The common high school speech-a-week model, wherein students are given a single experience in, say, delivering a speech to convince and wherein that speech also serves as a "test," places undue emphasis on evaluation.

Since communication involves risk, it is not wise to engage in deliberate evaluation until the class has created a climate of trust. Indeed, oral communication activities are an excellent means of "breaking the ice" and establishing that sense of community and mutual support. A teacher would not want students to equate speaking and listening experiences with evaluation. In the course of developing of any classroom community, early oral communication activities provide the teacher with occasions to model active listening behaviors. The opportunity for learning norms of active listening is so great on these occasions that it should not be diluted by imposing the additional burdens of evaluation.

When evaluation *is* appropriate, however, the teacher's greatest challenge lies in creating a context for communication in which being evaluated is not the sole, or even the dominant, purpose for speaking or listening. Since communication behaviors are situation-specific, tasks which reflect students' true communication skills must incorporate elements of authentic communication contexts. Contrast the following two assignments:

> Prepare a persuasive speech of no more than three minutes in length in which you present an issue of current importance in international affairs. What should the foreign policy position of the United States be with regard to this issue? You will be graded on content, organization, and delivery. Be sure to turn in outline and bibliography.

> We have been talking quite a bit lately about what the world will be like by the time some of you have teenage children. We have been discussing how American foreign policy today will have an impact on the world of tomorrow. Remember that we also decided that we would send, as a class, a position paper to the Secretary of State. So we need to come to some agreement about what our foreign policy should be with respect to currently important inter-

national affairs. To help us do this, each of us will choose a foreign policy issue and try to persuade the class of the validity of our position. Since we have about two days for this phase of our project, each of us will have about three minutes to speak. Any more time would throw us off schedule. Also, be sure to bring in an outline and a bibliography so that we can refer to these when we are writing our position paper. Remember, also, that you will be most effective in convincing us of your point of view if you pay attention to those aspects of speech making which we discussed in class: adapting content, organization, and delivery to your audience and purpose. You may elect to include this presentation as one of the five graded assignments for this project.

The first assignment offers no pretense for communication other than to provide the teacher with performance which can be evaluated. The second assignment, conducted in a student-centered classroom does seek to supply a sense of authentic purpose and audience. The first assignment is likely to result in material students have regurgitated from a popular newsweekly. The second is more likely to engender a thoughtful and well-crafted response.

Simulation exercises play an important role in creating contexts which will support efforts at evaluating oral communication. It is difficult to justify formal communication behaviors when students are addressing an audience of well-known peers. To insist on formal diction, for example, would belie the foundation of instruction in communication competence: insistence on contextually appropriate adaptation. Teachers can, however, ask the class to role play a different audience. Thus, a student can practice addressing a persuasive talk to the County Commission or describing a clock assembly to an astronaut in a space capsule. Students can practice buttonholing strangers for donations to a school improvement project. Note, however, that role-playing assignments can result in dismally disappointing performances unless the class has been properly prepared and directed (26).

Other resources in the school should also be exploited. Sixth grade students can descend upon a second grade classroom for a session of storytelling or tutoring. Students can take turns offering survival instructions to a newcomer in the class.

In evaluating students, teachers should devise criteria that are specifically tailored to the assessment contexts. Standards for quality of expression are not absolute. Like communication behaviors, standards for communication evaluation are situation-specific. Thus, a criterion like "anticipates and refutes counter arguments" is an important evaluative criterion to be used in judging persuasive talk but obviously has no bearing on storytelling performance. In a like vein, a student who uses popular idioms like "neat" and "cool" might receive an acceptable rating along a dimension of "appropriate language use" in a peer group discussion. But the student would receive a poor rating in a simulated interview in which he or she was applying for a loan. If a teacher were interested in evaluating students' skill in empathic listening, the communication context must be one in which speakers are encouraged to express their emotions. A conversation

abut family relationships would be more appropriate listening material in this regard than would a talk about techniques for bandaging broken limbs.

In most communication situations, speaking and listening are virtually simultaneous activities. For the sake of convenience, however, the two are separated in the sections below in order to describe methods of evaluation. Because oral communication performance is so interwoven with communication attitudes, one additional section which pertains to the affective domain is provided.

**Methods for Evaluting Speaking Proficiency**

We have claimed that assessment techniques, in accordance with the very nature of communication competence, must take situational factors into account. One way of categorizing communication contexts is to array them along a continuum from formal, extended, uninterrupted, and planned on the one hand to informal, reciprocal, spontaneous, and nondirected on the other (29). The more formal speech situations afford greater control for the teacher and are easier to evaluate because they elicit more connected discourse. Opportunities for evaluating more interactive talk ought not be neglected, however, lest students harbor the impression that these are less important, less worthy of cultivation.

*Oral Reading*. The most constrained, least interactive speech situation is reading aloud. In this situation, the evaluator's attention is drawn to matters of delivery--intonation, enunciation, volume, and pronunciation. While these evaluation criteria are appropriate to the task of reading aloud, oral reading is nevertheless an act of communication. The primary consideration in evaluating students' oral reading is reflected in the criterion of "interpretation". Does the student recognize and convey the meaning and tone of a written text?

*Extended Monologue*. Clustering also at the formal end of the spectrum of speech situations are talks, speeches, and oral reports--all species of extended monologue. For many educators, extended monologues constitute the entirety of oral classroom assigments. Unfortunately, extended monologues are especially liable to elicit artificial communication behaviors unless they are rooted in a sense of purpose and audience. For many youngsters, especially members of minority cultures,the extended, uninterrupted monologue represents a particularly unfamiliar communication context (20, 10). This doesn't mean that children should be deprived of instruction in connected oral discourse. However, some authorities recommend deferring experiences in formal public speaking until after the elementary grades (1). But, most primary grade children are capable of producing oral narratives, extended monologues that can be evaluated along criteria like "goes beyond the information in the stimulus picture" or "differentiates among characters."

*Group Discussion*. Small group discussion can span a wide range of formality. Panel discussions, for example, can incorporate many aspects of extended monologue, while problem solving in a leaderless group approximates conversation more closely. Whatever the type of group discussion, however, the criteria of "cooperative thinking," "integration into the group," and "appropriate degree of participation" are suitable ones for evaluation. Often, teachers choose to eval-

uate the entire group as a whole, rather than individual performances. In this way, evaluation procedures emphasize the holistic nature of group behavior.

*Conversation.* Of course, casual conversation between two people--dyadic conversation--occupies the end of the communication continuum most marked by spontaneity and free interaction. As interaction increases, it becomes more difficult to separate the role of speaker from that of listener. Since interviewing is goal-oriented and maintains different degrees of control among the participants, this form of conversation lends itself to evaluation. Interviews have frequently been used in second language learning assessment, but most often criteria are not communicative but linguistic in nature (e.g., "sentence structure," "morphology"). Some criteria for evaluating the communicative proficiency of interviewees include "responsiveness" (elaborates beyond minimally informative answers), "initiative" (asks or rephrases questions when appropriate), and "social rituals" (greets interviewer and closes conversation) (23).

*Speech Rating Scales.* Most often, teachers evaluate student performances by means of rating scales. The scales enumerate appropriate criteria, and the teacher either assigns a numerical score to each criterion (e.g., 1 through 5) or else checks off that the speaker has displayed the desired skill (e.g., "speaks loudly enough"). The following set of rating scales illustrate how evaluation criteria can be tailored to the specific "rhetorical traits" of a speaking assignment. In this case, students were asked to role play a meeting of the County Commission. Each student delivered a persuasive talk to a board of three Commissioners, attempting to sway them concerning an item that appeared on a previously distributed agenda (23).

***Public Hearing Feedback Form***

***1. INTRODUCTION:***
- ***(1) none***
- ***(2) just names proposal***
- ***(3) names proposal and attempts to capture interest***
- ***(4) names proposal and provides novel or elaborated approach***

***2. PURPOSE:***
- ***(1) no point of view***
- ***(2) vague point of view***
- ***(3) unambiguously states position on proposal***
- ***(4) states position with emphasis or situational qualifier***

***3. REASONS:***
- ***(1) unsupported assertion***
- ***(2) unelaborated reasons given***
- ***(3) at least one reason supported***
- ***(4) several reasons supported or especially apt support***

*4. ORGANIZATION:*
- *(1) ideas wholly unrelated*
- *(2) ideas only implicitly related*
- *(3) logical sequence or simple transitions*
- *(4) proper emphasis and explicit connections between ideas*

*5. OBJECTIONS:*
- *(1) does not acknowledge reservations*
- *(2) acknowledges but does not refute reservations*
- *(3) refutes at least one reservation*
- *(4) refutes several reservations or especially apt refutation*

*6. CONCLUSION:*
- *(1) no conclusion or merely states that remarks are finished*
- *(2) just thanks Commission or just restates position*
- *(3) restates position and offers thanks*
- *(4) summarizes or concludes memorably and offers thanks*

*7. LANGUAGE STYLE:*
- *(1) slang or incomprehensible on several occasions*
- *(2) very vague or distracting "fillers" or written language*
- *(3) minimally fluent, appropriate formality*
- *(4) vivid phrasing, highly comprehensible*

*8. ORAL EXPRESSION:*
- *(1) monotone*
- *(2) inappropriate or distracting inflection on several occasions or memorized*
- *(3) conversational variation in inflection*
- *(4) tone of voice expresses conviction or emphasis*

*9. SPEECH RATE AND VOLUME:*
- *(1) inaudible*
- *(2) rate too fast or too slow - distracting*
- *(3) speech rate and volume do not strain listeners*
- *(4) variation in rate or volume used for added expressiveness*

*10. GESTURES:*
- *(1) distracting mannerisms or posture*
- *(2) no eye contact with Commissioners*
- *(3) eye contact established, comfortable posture*
- *(4) facial, body, or hand gestures for emphasis or illustration*

A simpler type of rating scale which is applicable across a broad range of communication tasks, and which provides students with less specific feedback, asks teachers to make holistic judgements on four dimensions of speech (16):

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. CONTENT: | 3. LANGUAGE: |
| (1) inadequate | (1) inadequate |
| (2) minimal | (2) minimal |
| (3) adequate | (3) adequate |
| (4) superior | (4) superior |
| 2. ORGANIZATION: | 4. DELIVERY: |
| (1) inadequate | (1) inadequate |
| (2) minimal | (2) minimal |
| (3) adequate | (3) adequate |
| (4) superior | (4) superior |

It is best, of course, if rating scales are accompanied by the teacher's written and/or oral comments explaining in more detail the reasons for each rating.

In rating speech performances, teachers need to beware of the numerous sources of bias and inconsistency that can intrude into this sort of subjective evaluation (27). Teacher fatigue, we know, can result in different standards of stringency applied to the first speakers compared to the last. The materials which are used to stimulate speech can be familiar to children of one group but not another. The evaluation criteria can be biased toward one group or another. For example, a criterion which demands standard English pronunication will obviously work against speakers of non-standard dialects and students whose dominant language is not English (although most students can display considerable code switching toward the standard if the context for speaking is appropriate and sufficiently rich). In constructing rating scales, teachers need to consider whether a criterion of standard English is proper at all, and if it is, whether it should be given so much prominence that it outweighs all other communication skills.

Finally, teachers must be on guard against the influence of student characteristics which are really extraneous to how well they communicate. We are all susceptible to being led astray by our expectations. Teachers tend to give more positive ratings to physically attractive students (25). Dialect itself triggers stereotyped reactions which are sometimes hard to overcome in evaluating actual abilities (30).

*Other Techniques for Evaluating Speech.* Although rating scales--because of their convenience and flexibility--will always be the mainstay of classroom evaluation of speech proficiency, other techniques are available. For example, groups involved in problem solving discussions can be evaluated with respect to their efficiency, that is, the time elapsed and the accuracy of their solution. Pairs of students engaged in referential or descriptive communication can also be evaluated in terms of communication accuracy (4). A storyteller might be evaluated according to relatively concrete criteria which indicate consistency between an original story and a subsequent retelling (6).

**Evaluating Listening Proficiency.**

*Sources of Listening Test Materials.* Techniques for evaluating listening performances are tied to the several purposes of listening (see pages 94-97 on listening) and therefore are no less varied than methods of assessing speaking proficiency. Most often, teacher-made listening tests are tests of literal comprehension. The teacher recites or reads aloud some factual material, and the students recall the information. One technique which can be a good deal more motivating for students is to arrange for student speakers to construct listening comprehension tests based on their own presentations. Broadcast media, especially commerical messages, provide useful materials for evaluating students' skills at discerning the point of view conveyed by a message. Sound discrimination can be tested by tape-recording environmental sounds (trash can clanging, car starting) and interspersing these with speech sounds. Teachers can also make use of pantomime activities in which the class is asked to decode the emotional state acted out by a classmate or a character on film. Several commercially produced tests of listening skill, some of which are keyed to listening instruction packages, are also available (15).

*Modes of Response on Listening Tests.* Most often, listening proficiency is measured in terms of accuracy: How many details about steel production did the student recall correctly? Did the student accurately identify what point the speaker was supporting in emphasizing the safety record of nuclear reactors? Multiple choice questions are often a convenient response mode for indicating listening accuracy. However, free open-ended responses can be useful in evaluating inferential listening (e.g., "After listening to Washington's Farewell Address, what do you think he would say about American membership in the United Nations?"). Open-ended responses can also help to capture students' aesthetic responses to oral literature. Aesthetic responses can be identified by asking students to draw, to write about their feelings, to tell or make up a story which might make others feel the same feelings.

Another response mode which is appropriate for integrative listening, (listening for instructions) asks students to respond behaviorally. Thus, students may be asked to perform the commands encoded in a listening passage ("First cross the right hand string over the left hand one, than pull it through the loop from behind"). Or they might be asked to visually represent or to identify an object which a classmate is describing (4).

An interesting listening task which taps children's abilities to follow directions together with their ability to listen critically was developed by Flavell and his associates. In this test, children are read a set of telephone instructions and are provided with an accompanying map. Their job is to list all of the inadequacies in the message: (See accompanying chart on page 145.)

Empathic listening can also be measured. An adaptation of the Dymond Empathy test (5) first gives students an opportunity for free conversation. They then mark a set of attitude scales not only to reflect their self-perceptions during the course of the interaction, but also to predict their partner's perceptions. Empathic listening skill is judged by the degree of match between the students' perceptions and the corresponding perceptions of the partner.

## STUDENT LISTENING ACTIVITY

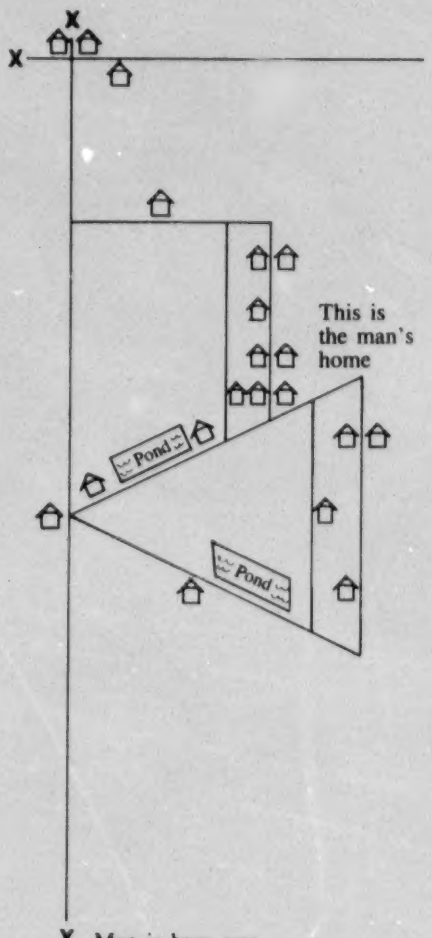
Teacher (or student who reads well) reads a set of instructions for reaching the destination. The instructions contain several inadequacies. Students are told to listen to the instructions carefully and list (tell) all the things which are wrong with them, how they might be confusing. E.g. (for the attached map) — Teacher reads,

*Student Hears*

"Suppose there was a man in his car out in the country who was lost. He didn't know how to get home. He has the same map you have in front of you, except his map doesn't show where he is now or where his home is located. Now he calls me up and I can figure out where he is now. I also know where his home is, just as it's marked on your map. I'm going to talk to him on the phone and tell him how to get home. I want you to listen very carefully and tell (list) all the things that are *wrong* with my directions, all the reasons why he would have trouble getting to the right house. Okay, here is what I tell him.

If you look at the map you'll find an X. That's where you are right now. You go down the road until you see a house on your left. Turn right there and keep going until you pass a pond on your left. Then you make a left turn and the house you want is the second one on the street." (Based on Flavell, et al., *The Development of Role-taking and Communication Skills in Children*, 1968.)

*Student Sees*



**Assessing Attitudes Toward Communication**

Self-expression unavoidably (and desireably) accompanies all other communication functions. We involuntarily "give off" information about our feelings even as we "give" other message content in a more controlled and deliberate fashion. Moreover, our attitudes toward ourselves as communicators exert an impact on the quality of our expression. A person who is uncomfortable, say, interacting at a cocktail party is often perceived as an incompentent cocktail party communicator. Teachers require information about their students' attitudes toward communication in order to adequately evaluate and work with those students' communication skills.

Teachers generally form inchoate impressions of their students attitudes toward communication in general and classroom communication specifically. Sometimes, however, those impressions can be mistaken. A quiet child may be perceived as "well-behaved," even rewarded for his or her good conduct. In reality, however, this quiet child may be fearful about speaking up before a group. Another student may be perceived as a class clown, always free with light-hearted repartee. This child, too, may be disguising a deep-seated insecurity about his or her communication skills. Deliberate assessment of students' communication attitudes is a wise course to pursue.

*Communication Apprehension*. The most frequently investigated attitude toward communication is known as "communication apprehension" (CA) (8, 17). CA differs from situation-specific anxiety, like stage fright, because it is an enduring personality trait, whereas stage fright is a normal reaction to particularly threatening circumstances. About one in five students experience CA to a degree that will significantly affect their lives (18). For example, high CA individuals avoid classes which require active participation, marry or go steady early, may even select isolaged places to live. High CA students, though of all ranges of ability, often do poorly in school, frequently suffer from negative expectations of teachers, and often choose low profile jobs which prevent them from fulfilling their potential in the workplace. Students who experience high CA ought not to be asked to recite aloud. They should not be called upon and put on the spot before the entire class, which will only exacerbate the degree to which they find oral communication to be punishing. A number of instruments have been developed to help identify reticent students. Among the most often utilized questionnaires are the "Personal Report of Communication Apprehension" for adults and "Personal Report of Communication Fear" for middle school through high school students (18). The "Measure of Elementary Communication Apprehension" (9) is appropriate for younger children, including those who are not yet reading.

*Self-Disclosure*. Another important set of attitudes toward communication pertains to self-disclosure or willingness to reveal personal information to others. In general, appropriate self-disclosure is an attribute of communication competence (12). Individuals with positive attitudes toward self-disclosure are perceived as friendly and trustworthy. Attitudes toward self-disclosure can be assessed by a number of informal means. One communication activity which often elicits strong reactions is to ask students to tell about a time when they were in great danger, perhaps about a time when they were in danger of dying. Teachers can observe

how freely students make reference to their emotional states in those anecdotes. Alternatively, teachers can compose surveys which include items like: "These are things about myself which I would only tell to my best friend," "These are things about myself I would tell to a student in this class whom I don't know very well." Of course, students should only be asked to voluntarily share items on the lists with teachers. Whether or not they choose to share constitutes data about attitudes toward self-disclosure.

*Language Attitudes.* One final category of attitudes toward communication focuses on students' attitudes toward language varieties. In our society, as in all societies, some dialects are valued more than others. Speakers of less valued dialects frequently share, or even exaggerate, societal norms in their attitudes toward their own speech (13, 30). Speakers with particularly negative attitudes toward their own speech varieties are liable to exhibit linguistic hypercorrection. They will try so hard to attain prestigious speech forms that they overcompensate for their native non-standard forms. Sometimes linguistically insecure individuals insert consonants where they do not belong, or produce malapropisms. Teachers can readily devise questionnaires which include prestige language forms along with parallel non-standard variants. Students can indicate their attitudes toward these forms in a number of ways. For example, they might list next to each language feature a job description which comes from a scale of occupations of varying prestige (13).

*Communication Journals.* Besides contrived questionnaires and communication activities, student journals are another useful source of information about attitudes toward communication. If teachers encourage students to use the journal as a forum for discussing their daily interactions, comments which reveal affective dimensions of communication will emerge with great frequency. Any technique which engenders self-awareness about communication is likely to be of therapeutic value for students, and at the same time will illuminate for teachers some of the roots of their students' communication behaviors.

**Summary**

Because oral communication assessment involves particular risks, it is justifiable only if the information which is gathered through evaluation will be put to positive uses. Evaluating students' speaking and listening skills can help teachers adjust planning, provide for individual differences, and supply needed feedback to facilitate development in communication competence. Not all communication experiences should be evaluated, and those which teachers do choose to grade require an authentic context for communicating--a purpose and an audience. Evaluation criteria can be tailored to the specific demands appropriate to each communication situtation. In evaluating speaking skills, therefore, criteria for formal communication tasks will differ from those appropriate for informal communication. The criterion of standard English speech patterns need not dominate evaluation. In addition, teachers need to be aware of numerous sources of inconsistency and bias in rating speech performances. Methods for evaluating listening skills are also quite varied, and are likewise designed to capture the particular demands of the different purposes and settings for communication. Other useful

information pertains to students' attitudes toward communication. Communication apprehension, willingness to disclose oneself, and attitudes toward language varieties can be readily ascertained.

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### *What are the best ways to evaluate writing?*

As they plan the educational program for the students in their classrooms each year, teachers must consider three major elements. First, they must develop goals and objectives for the program. They then must design an instructional program that will effectively meet those goals. Planning for instruction involves major decisions: What, for example will be the mix of instruction--will reading, mathematics, and writing be taught every day, with science, social studies, and art being worked into the week two or three times? Will the basic skills and the content areas be integrated, with some focus on each subject every day? How will the classroom be organized and managed? How will time be allocated to the variety of activities that have to occur each day or each week or each quarter? How will children with special needs be helped? These and many more questions must be addressed in the planning process.

Finally, teachers must develop procedures for determining whether the instruction has been successful and the goals have been met. This is done by assessing the performance of the students. Did the students learn what the teacher hoped they would? As they develop their plans for assessment, it is important that teachers look beyond the convenience of paper-and-pencil tests to the fact that there are many educational goals that cannot be measured through the use of fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions. In writing instruction, for example, such tests will not give the teacher a sense of whether

- students are able to take an idea, create a plan for developing that idea, and implement the plan on paper, thus creating a short story, an essay, a paragraph, or a poem;
- students understand that effective communication must be purposeful and must be directed at a specific audience;
- students are motivated to write because they view writing as an effective means for communicating with and in some sense for controlling the world around them;
- students who are able to accurately answer the questions on the test will be able to apply the same principles and rules in their own writing as they are needed.

When we think about evaluation of students' performance, we must consider not only how the performance is assessed but also how the results of the assessment or assessments are reported to the students, to the district, to parents, and to the community. Typical methods of reporting range from grades on papers and tests, to report cards, parent/teacher conferences, and to announcement of results of standardized tests in local media.

These are some of the questions that a teacher must answer as he or she chooses a method for evaluating and reporting student progress:

- What method of assessment matches the goals I have set for my educational program?
- What do I want to know about the progress my students have made?
- Which method of assessment will tell me whether my instructional program has been effective?
- Do I want to know only what has been learned during a given period, with no eye toward future instruction (summative evaluation), or do I want an assessment method that will give me information about how to adjust instruction to best meet the needs of the children (formative evaluation)?
- How do I want to communicate with my students and their parents about the progress the students are making and about the instructional program?
- What can I do effectively, given the limitations on my time? What adjustments will I have to make if I adopt a particular method?
- What do I *have* to do; that is, what are the constraints placed on me by forces outside the classroom? (The principal, superintendent, and state education agency may have set goals which narrow the range of choices the teacher has as he or she designs a program and a plan for assessment; textbook publishers also influence the teacher's planning, if the school has adopted or mandated particular texts or series.) Given those demands, what alterntives and choices do I have?

Such considerations set the context for the following description of assessment procedures that can be used to evaluate children's writing performance. Four last points, however. First, *it is critical that teachers view themselves as having real choices*. If the school district or the state has mandated that children must be tested using a paper-and-pencil, multiple-choice procedure, the teacher will have to comply with that mandate. But instruction and the classroom environment can be structured in such a way that several additional approaches to assessment can be instituted--approaches which will give the teacher far more valuable information than the results of the paper-and-pencil procedures alone, approaches that will not be so time consuming that they take valuable hours away from instruction.

Second, *it is not absolutely essential that every piece of each child's writing be assessed*. Children, especially younger children (2), need to have feedback on all of the writing they do, but that feedback does not always have to come from the teacher; it can also come from their peers and their families. As children grow older, they can be allowed to pick out their best pieces of writing for the teacher to comment on formally. The important thing here is that children must be given many opportunities to write--opportunities that arise out of their own need or desire to communicate a particular message to a particular audience, opportunities that occur naturally and reinforce the learning process. Opportunities for peer interaction, particularly, give teachers valuable chances for indirect assessment of children's growth.

Third, *teachers evaluate writing to discover whether a purpose has been achieved*. Therefore, how best to evaluate writing may vary as the purposes of writing vary. In addition, teachers may want to assess the progress children are making at various stages as they move through the writing process.

Finally, a *major role the teacher plays in the classroom is as a respondent to children*, whether they are writing, talking with the teacher or another child, solving a problem, participating in a small group discussion, taking a test, or engaging in a variety of other activities. This role goes hand in hand with the teacher's role as evaluator. The way in which the teacher responds to and interacts with a child will have a direct influence on how that child learns.

The teacher must build a trusting relationship with the children in his or her classroom so the children will learn that it is all right to take risks and to express themselves freely. If children view the teacher only as an evaluator of their attempts at communication, they will quickly learn to spend their time trying to find out what it is that the teacher wants.

**Evaluation Strategies**

Evaluating writing is often seen as a process of grading "final products," with red ink or pencil indicating each error in grammar, usage, or mechanical conventions of standard English. This method is appropriate when the purpose of instruction is learning mechanics, when the child is at a point in his or her development where attention to such matters is appropriate, when the relationship between the student and the teacher is characterized by trust and cooperation, and when the teacher observes that the student makes fewer of the kinds of errors marked in subsequent pieces of writing. The disadvantage of the method is that it tends to make the child's errors more visible, visually and intellectually, than are the child's achievements. Typically, such evaluation does not offer specific feedback on the content or organization of what *is* written, and it offers no feedback on what is *not* there. The effect is often to discourage children without improving their writing; they learn that the "purpose" of writing is to please the teacher.

The paper-and-pencil test has been the most familiar way of testing the writing ability of groups of children. Usually consisting of fill-in-the-blank or multiple choice questions, these tests, which can be teacher-made or commercially published, measure students' writing ability indirectly. They evaluate students' ability to write by testing their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, sentence structure, and syntax. Children are asked to complete sentences by filling in the blank, to identify which sentence among four has a mistake in it, to choose which of four answers would correct an identified mistake in a sentence, and so on. The results of tests which are developed by the teacher and which reflect the instruction the children have received can provide useful information to the teacher. When the test is developed by a commercial publisher, however, there is too often pressure to teach to the test. Results of the test may not reflect the actual ability levels or needs of the children tested.

***A Comparison of Scoring Methods for Direct Writing Assessment***

| *Descriptor* | *Holistic* | *Analytical* |
|---|---|---|
| General Capabilities | Comprehensive, general picture of student performance; writing viewed as a unified coherent whole. Applicable to any writing task. | Thorough, trait by trait analysis of writing; provides comprehensive picture of performance *if* enough traits are analyzed; traits are those important to *any* piece of writing in *any* situation (e.g., organization, wording, mechanics). |
| Reliability | High reliability if standards are carefully established and raters are carefully trained. | High reliability if criteria and standards are well defined, and careful training is conducted. |
| Preparation Time | Up to one day per item to identify range finder (model) papers; up to one-half day to train readers using 4-point scale; full day to train with 8-point scale. | One full day to identify traits; one day per trait to develop scoring criteria (unless traits and criteria are borrowed from another source); one to two days to review results of pilot test and refine traits or criteria as necessary; one-half day to train raters. |
| Readers | Qualified language arts personnel recommended; high reliability can be achieved with non-language arts readers given sufficient training. | Qualified language arts personnel recommended. |
| Scoring time | One to two minutes per paper (experienced readers may read faster). | One to two minutes per paper per trait. |
| Classroom Use | May be adapted for use in class. | May be adapted for use in class. |
| Reporting | Allows reporting on students' overall writing skill. | Allows reporting of student performance on wide range of generalizable traits (i.e., the qualities considered important to all good writing). |
| Group/Sample Size* | Primarily usable with a larger sample; with a small sample, responses may be difficult to scale. | Best with smaller samples; extensive scoring time *may* make costs prohibitive with larger groups. |

*These are very general guidelines. Due to the nature of the scoring-cost/amount-of-information trade-off across scoring methods, readers are urged to seek the technical assistance of a qualified writing assessment specialist if there is a question regarding the appropriate use of available scoring resources.

| ***Primary Trait*** | ***Writing Mechanics*** | ***T-Unit Analysis*** |
|---|---|---|
| Highly focused analysis of situation-specific primary trait (and possibly secondary traits); provides specific information on a narrowly defined writing task (e.g., ability to recount details in chronological order). | Can provide either a general or a specific profile of the student's ability to use mechanics properly. | Provides a measure of syntactical sophistication. |
| High reliability if criteria and standards are well defined, and careful training is conducted. | High reliability if given sufficient training time and authoritative, complete, acceptable guidelines (e.g., an English handbook). | High reliability provided trained and experienced raters are used. |
| One full day to identify traits, one day per trait to develop scoring criteria (unless traits and criteria are borrowed from another source); one to two days to review results of pilot test and refine traits or criteria as necessary; one-half day to train raters. | One to two days to set up a scoring system (unless borrowed from another source). Minimum of one day to internalize the scoring system and practice scoring. | Half day to full day, depending on raters' previous experience. |
| Qualified language arts personnel recommended; non-language arts staff may be able to score some traits. | Qualified language arts personnel recommended. | Raters *must* be experienced language arts personnel, preferably those already familiar with the concept of T-unit analysis. |
| One to two minutes per paper per trait. | Five minutes or more per paper, depending on number of criteria. | Varies greatly, depending on raters' skill. |
| May be adapted for use in class. | May be adapted for use in class. | May be adapted for use in class. |
| Allows reporting of student performance on one or more situation-specific traits important to a particular task. | Allows reporting of group or individual data on students' general strengths or weaknesses in mechanics. | Allows group or individual reporting on syntactical sophistication. |
| Generally more cost-effective with smaller samples, depending on the number of traits to be scored (with one trait, sample size is not an issue). | Best with small samples; extensive scoring time *may* make costs prohibitive with larger groups. | Best with smaller samples; extensive scoring time *may* make costs prohibitive with larger groups. |

from *Direct Measures of Writing Skill: Issues and Applications* by Vicki Spandel and Richard J. Stiggins, N WREL, Portland, OR, 1980.

Direct measures of writing ability involve the assessment of actual student writing samples. Four will be briefly described here. References following this chapter can be consulted by teachers who would like to have additional information about particular assessment procedures. In addition, we have included a table developed by Spandel and Stiggins (13) to compare these procedures on several dimensions.

### Holistic Scoring

In the holistic scoring procedure, raters bring the judgment criteria with them. These criteria may include specific factors such as style, usage, grammar, and tone, but the criteria are not directly defined or discussed. Rather, each paper is given a rating based on the judgment of the rater about the overall merit of the paper. Each paper is read by at least two raters, and then the two ratings can be combined or averaged.

Before the raters begin to work, training to help establish consistency among the raters and within each individual is provided. Then benchmark papers, or "range-finders," are identified. These are papers which are representative of those to be rated and which the raters can agree are representative of relatively bad papers and relatively good papers. The other papers are then rated, using the benchmark papers as guides. Despite the raters' personal preferences and criteria, holistic scoring quickly produces consistency among raters, probably because trained teachers of writing can agree on what constitutes a relatively good or a relatively bad paper (3, 11).

Cooper (3) describes several different kinds of scales that can be used for holistic scoring. Among these are

- The essay scale, a series of complete pieces arranged according to quality and ranging from exemplary to inadequate. The task of the rater is to determine where a piece of writing fits along the scale.
- The dichotomous scale, a series of statements that can be answered "yes" or "no" (for example, "The ideas are creative or original." "The thesis is adequately developed." "The details that are included are well ordered.")
- Elbow's "center of gravity" responses, intended for fomative response and feedback on an informal level (4). The reader goes through four steps after reading a piece of writing: 1. first tell very quickly what were found to be the main points, main feelings, or centers of gravity; 2. then summarize it into a single sentence; 3. then choose one word from the writing which best summarizes it; and 4. then choose a word that isn't in the writing that best summarizes it.

Elbow's response technique can be used successfully by students to respond to one another's writing.

Holistic scoring is rapid and efficient. Depending on the length of student papers, experienced raters can rate thirty to forty papers in an hour. Scoring is intensive work; short periods of work with frequent breaks yield the greatest degree of consistency.

### Analytical Scoring

To assess the student's ability to work with one or more specific conventions of writing (for example, syntax, punctuation, organization, usage, sense of au-

dience, or sentence structure), teachers may find the analytical method is useful. The factors are isolated and scored individually by raters. This method is especially useful for determining mastery of specific writing competencies, for student placement, and for formative and summative evaluation of writing programs.

The drawback to analytical scoring is that it is extremely time consuming. It may take two or three times longer to score a piece of writing analytically than it would holistically. However, analytical scoring does yield more specific information about the writer's ability to demonstrate specific competencies in writing, usually on the surface level.

### Primary-Trait Scoring

Primary-trait scoring is similar to analytical scoring in that it focuses on a specific characteristic of the writing. It is different in that it is situationally specific-the student is given a specific assignment, such as playing a role, and is assessed on his or her ability to fulfill the assignment, in this case adopting and maintaining the role. The success of the piece of writing is determined by the effect the piece has on the reader. A ghost story is *primarily* effective if it excites fear in the reader. This is a different trait from what we would expect to find in a letter to a prospective employer. Primary-trait scoring, therefore, judges the likelihood that the writing will produce the desired effect in the reader.

When assessing a paper, the reader is looking for the primary trait. It is also possible to evaluate a paper for specific secondary traits, traits which may be important to the effectiveness of the writing but which are not as critical as the primary trait.

The first step in developing an assignment which will be scored using the primary-trait system is to identify the primary trait to be assessed. The next step, and the most time consuming one, is to develop a scoring guide to be used to rate the writing that results from the assignment. The National Assessment of Educational Progress has used the primary-trait scoring system in assessing the writing of nine, thirteen, and seventeen year-olds. They used the following guide for scoring "letters to a principal on solving a problem in school":

| *A paper receives a score of:* | *If:* |
|---|---|
| 1 | Respondents do not identify a problem or give no evidence that the problem can be solved or is worth solving. |
| 2 | Respondents identify a problem and either tell h ow to solve it *or* tell how the school would be improved if it were solved. |
| 3 | Respondents identify a problem, explain how tosolve the problem, *and* tell how the school would be improved if the problem were solved. |
| 4 | Respondents include the elements of a "3" paper. In addition, the elements are expanded and presented in a systematic structure that reflects the steps necessary to solve the problem. (10) |

After raters have agreed on the definition of the primary trait, sometimes using benchmark papers, the rating will move smoothly and quickly (7, 8, 9).

### T-Unit Analysis

A T-unit is an independent clause and whatever subordinate clauses or phrases accompany it. (T means "terminable.") The following sentence has only one terminal mark of punctuation, but it divides into three T-units:

Nick ate the apple and the orange and he gave me the banana, which was turning brown, but I ate it.

The T-units are:

1. Nick ate the apple and the orange.
2. and he gave me the banana, which was turning brown.
3. but I ate it.

It has been demonstrated that the length of the T-unit tends to increase with the age and skill of the writer (6). Also, skilled writers can incorporate more and more distinct concepts in a single T-unit. T-unit 2, above, is an example of this phenomenon. In many ways, the concept of T-units resembles the classic language arts technique for helping students learn to use subordination in their work.

T-units can be used in two ways to assess writing. First, the student's writing can be divided into T-units, which can then be analyzed for length, complexity of concept, and so on. The second method is to present the student with a group of related T-units and ask him or her to combine them into one or more sentences (12). The maturity of the writer can be judged by examining the ways in which the student is able to produce fluent sentences from the T-units.

One caution, however: many skilled writers use extremely short sentences for particular literary effects. T-unit analysis performed on the work of Hemingway or Stephen Crane would render a large number of very short, simple T-units. The teacher who decides to use this assessment technique must keep this in mind. Conversely, many people can write on and on, using extremely long sentences, which, when divided into T-units, seem to indicate fluency. However long they are, sentences that are ineffective do not represent good writing.

### Other Assessment Techniques

Informal diagnosis is an important and ongoing responsibility of the teacher. Teachers can observe children's progress during their own interactions with them, while watching them interact with their peers -- both individually and in small groups, and by holding conferences with children at all stages of the writing process.

Self-evaluation, where students assume responsibility for assessing their own writing and for deciding which pieces of writing they will share with their peers and teacher, can promote organization skills, self-reliance, independence, and creativity (1). Students evaluate the various drafts as well as the final product, using teacher- and student-developed questions as a guide.

Peer evaluation can involve just two students who read each other's writing or small groups of students who meet periodically to make suggestions to one another, offer suggestions and support and, finally, edit one another's work. Again, teacher- or student-developed forms can aid in this process. Peer evaluation gives

students an opportunity to focus their attention away from the teacher and to see how their writing affects others in their peer group. Beaven notes that research studies dealing with peer groups and evaluation generally indicate that "improvement in theme-writing ability and grammar usage, when small groups of students engage in peer evaluation, may equal or even exceed the improvement that occurs under evaluation procedures carried out by the teacher" (1).

## Summary

The assessment techniques selected by the teacher to evaluate the writing performance of his or her students must reflect the goals the teacher has set and must be directly related to the instructional procedures the teacher is using in the classroom. Different assessment techniques will be used as the purposes for evaluating writing change. Whether T-unit analysis, holistic, analytical, or primary-trait scoring, or informal evaluation techniques are used, assessment of actual student writing samples at all stages of the writing process can best inform the instructional process.

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# *THE TEACHER AND COMMUNICATION*

***The roles of the teacher--as editor, evaluator, model, and instructor--in the development of students' communicative skill are discussed in this final section. In a very real sense, this section is a summary of the themes and ideas which have been presented throughout all the other chapters.***

### *What teacher behaviors improve oral and written communication?*

In the other chapters in this book, we have offered suggestions for how teachers can help children come to view communication as a process and develop the ability to use that process as a tool for learning, for self-expression, and for having an effect on the world around them--their families, their peers, their teachers, and others. Here, we want to suggest some teacher characteristics that are essential to the success of that venture. Most important, of course, is that the teacher who wants children to view communication as a process must create a classroom atmosphere in which oral communication and written communication are integral parts of the school day:

> Effective oral interaction cannot be thought of as being the same thing as reading of a report; nor does learning to "take turns" constitute any vital understanding of the art of group discussion. The teacher who has students play little elocution games probably teaches them very little that is positive or helpful about communication. One sure way to teach students how to avoid breaking any of the rules is to insist that they speak from memory. One sure way to teach that speech communication is not a very important skill is to have a lot of little impromptu talks in class on silly or trivial subjects. One sure way to teach that communication is not a process is to have students "write a speech" on such-and-such, which may or may not ever be given. The result of such approaches is not communication at all, but a game in which the byword is "wake me up when it's my turn." (3)

Children come to school with an intuitive knowledge that communication can be used as an effective tool for expressing their feelings, for accomplishing goals, for controlling other people, and for many other purposes. The teacher's responsibility is to build upon and expand that knowledge. If oral communication and written communication are compartmentalized, dissected, relegated to 10 or 20 minutes per day, the children will very quickly realize that these activities are not very important to the teacher.

*Building Trust.* Perhaps the most important thing a teacher can do to expand upon the oral and written communication capabilities of children is to create a classroom environment that builds trust--an environment where the meaning of what the child is communicating takes precedence over how accurate or polished the delivery of the message is; an environment that has as a major goal the building or strengthening of the child's self-concept; an environment in which there are frequent opportunities for sustained interaction among students and between student(s) and teacher.

This is a good place to bring up the controversy between proponents of direct instruction (instruction that is teacher-directed, academically focused, and centered on sequenced and structured materials) and proponents of an open classroom, which focuses on creating a warm, accepting environment that is student-centered. Good (4), Peterson and Walberg (11), Medley (9), and others have looked at the research that has studied one or the other of these instructional approaches or that has tried to compare the two. The final word is not in, although, as Peterson points out, it appears that each approach may be necessary at different times and for different purposes in all classrooms and that the important criterion will continue to be the needs of the individual child:

> although a more direct or traditional teaching approach may be slightly better, on the average, than an open approach for increasing students' achievement, an open approach appears to be better than a more direct approach for increasing students' creativity, independence, curiosity, and favorable attitudes toward school and learning. In addition, the research suggests that some kinds of students may do better in an open approach and others may do better in a more direct approach. The implication is that, if educators want to achieve a wide range of educational objectives and if they want to meet the needs of all students, then neither direct instruction alone nor open-classroom teaching alone is sufficient (10)

Obviously, the goals and objectives of the shcool district and the teacher will, to a large extent, determine the nature of the classroom environment. It seems clear, however, that the growth of children's capabilities in both oral and written communication depends on the opportunities they are given for sustained interaction with their peers and with adults. Classroom time must be given to such activities.

*Enjoying Language.* Teachers should enjoy language and should expect their students to enjoy language. If the teacher places a high value on the use of language, both spoken and written, the students in his or her classroom will learn to value language. Language play, such as riddles, rhymes, puns, and jokes, is one way that teachers can express their enjoyment of language. Expressing delight in children's use of new word or in particularly effective uses of language by children will reinforce their use of language and their self-esteem.

One very important aspect of increasing children's enjoyment of language involves building respect for language variation. Both the teacher and the students can learn from students who use a language or a dialect different from that of the other members of the class. Having bilingual or bidialectal children in the classroom represents an opportunity to help students acquire an understanding of the richness of language and an appreciation of the incredible flexibility and capapacity for learning that human beings have.

*Talking About Language.* Teachers should talk about language, calling children's attention to special features of language and to particularly effective uses of language by children and adults at the time they occur. This can include helping children to become aware of the language structures they already know, making them aware of alternative structures, and comparing structures used by different children. For example, a teacher might draw attention to the fact that two children, using the same dialect or two different dialects, have said or written the

same thing in two different ways but with the same effect. In this way, children will learn *about* language at the same time that they learn *through* language.

*Teaching by Example.* The teacher should serve as a positive role model, demonstrating for children the characteristics of communication that he or she wants the children to exhibit. If the teacher wants students to believe that writing can be an effective form of self-expression and a means for controlling their world, the teacher must demonstrate that she or he values writing. As often as possible, the teacher should write with the children--not lesson plans or entries in the grade book, but pieces or writing that fulfill the teacher's need to express his or her ideas to a specific audience for a specific purpose. Asking children to read and comment on the teacher's writing might turn out to be a valuable experience for both. Perhaps most important, the children will be able to see that adults also experience writing as a series of stages. When writing, adults, including professional writers, might spend much time in thought before they begin to write. They too toss several sheets of paper in the wastebasket before they begin writing in earnest. Adults also express dissatisfaction with their writing and sometimes need to rewrite or reorganize, occasionally several times. Adult writers usually go over their writing one more time to make sure that it is clear and correct.

Teachers should also serve as role models for listening behavior. Much of this behavior is assured if the teacher has respect for the child. For example, not interrupting a child who is speaking, giving the child time to answer or speak, and making eye contact demonstrate the teacher's respect for the child. It is important to acknowledge a child who has given an answer or made a contribution to a conversation. The teacher can give feedback--show that he or she has been listening--by paraphrasing what the student has said, by responding honestly, or by commenting briefly and asking the class to comment on what the student has said. For young children the teacher can serve as discussion leader, modeling the behavior necessary to encourage involvement of all participants; as children learn these behaviors, their small group discussions can be led by one of their peers.

*Building Appropriate Expectations.* The teacher should develop positive but appropriate expectations for individual students. This is particularly important in a multilingual or multicultural classroom. Brophy and Good offer this advice:

> Teachers can avoid many problems by adopting appropriate general expectations about teaching, by learning to recognize their specific attitudes and expectations about individual students, and by learning to monitor their treatment of individual students. In particular, it is essential that teachers remember that their primary responsibility is to teach, to help each student reach his potential as a learner. It is natural that teachers form differential attitudes and expectations about different students because each student is an individual. To the extent that these are accurate and appropriate, they are helpful for planning ways to meet each student's needs. However, they must constantly be monitored and evaluated to insure that they change appropriately in response to changes in the students. (1).

*Focusing on Individual Progress.* The teacher should focus on individual progress rather than comparing students to one another. For example, children should be encouraged to look at their own progress over a period of time instead of trying to figure out whether they are better or worse than their peers. Samples

of a student's writing can be kept in a folder; the child can then compare pieces of writing done throughout the year, perhaps a piece written in December or March with a piece written the previous September. This will give the child an opportunity to see how his or her writing has changed during that time and to talk about language with other children and with the teacher.

Similarly, the teacher might tape-record a conversation with each child in the class at the beginning of the year and perhaps a second time three or four months later. The teacher can play the recordings for each child toward the end of the year. The child will be interested in his or her growth, and this affords the teacher another opportunity to talk with the child about language. Children who spoke a language or dialect other than the primary language or dialect of the classroom at the beginning of the year might especially benefit from such a series of tapes, and the teacher will gain invaluable information about their progress. Again, from Brophy and Good (1)

> Students should be taught to focus on their own progress over time . . ., so that the classroom norm becomes "do better than yesterday" rather than "outperform George." This is a difficult task to accomplish, because students (and teachers) are used to measuring their worth on a comparative basis with others. Nevertheless, if students are truly to grow in the classroom, they must gain interest and skills in self-growth and self-evaluation. Obviously, teachers who allow for individual assignments (students draw one of thirty objects, not the same one), will have an easier time inculcating interest in mastery rather than competition. . . .It is important for teachers to become concerned about the process of learning, not just about learning products (1).

Another aspect of individualizaton is tailoring the sequence of assignments for specific students. Students can then use their own work as a springboard for their next writing experience. In order for this strategy to work well, the teacher must be skilled at observation--watching children (focusing not only on the child speaking but also on the child or children who are listening), looking for changes and indications of progress or need for help, and making adjustments as necessary.

*Using All Subject Areas.* The teacher should use all available opportunities in all of the subject areas to expand children's knowledge and use of language. Mathematics, social studies, science, music, art all provide opportunities to talk and write about uses and purposes of language distinct from those in any of the other subjects.

In addition, the teacher can use the world outside of the classroom to develop children's understanding of language. This can involve following the development of community events relevant to the children's lives; thinking, reading, talking, and writing about matters of national interest; watching and responding to television programs and listening to and responding to radio programs; reading a series of newspaper stories; and so on. At the beginning, the teacher can control these activities, but the children can gradually assume a major part of the responsibility for generating and expanding them.

*Building Teacher Professionalism.* Finally, teachers should view themselves as part of a professional community of educators, a community to which they can and should contribute as well as from which they can learn. Teachers with positive self-concepts can see the importance of and will devote the time and energy that is required to build the self-concepts of the children in their classroom.

Within the school community, teachers can consult with one another, offering suggestions, feedback, and support. A group of teachers might, for example, identify a problem they seem to have in common and devise a strategy for taking a closer look at the problem and trying out some techniques they think might help alleviate it. They can also form a writing group and act as peer editors for one another.

Teachers can and should contribute to the inservice education that is offered by their school district. Research and observation make it clear that teachers have not been adequately trained to help children become effective communicators. This has led in recent years to a movement to change the curricula of colleges and universities--both in their standard courses of study and in their continuing education programs--and to an inservice education focus on filling the gap left by the inadequacy of such training for teachers (2, 5, 8).

Of particular interest to teachers who want to contribute to inservice training in their own school district might be the work of the National Writing Project. The developers of this project agreed "that most teachers do not know how to teach writing because they have not been trained as teachers of writing; that inservice programs to improve writing instruction should bridge the gap between research and practice involving both universities and school districts; and that, given the prospect of fewer new teachers coming into the schools, curriculum improvement should be accomplished through continuous inservice programs" (6). The project was based on the fundamental premise that teachers who teach writing should begin by becoming knowledgeable about and comfortable with their own writing abilities.

Begun as the Bay Area Writing Project in 1974, this project has drawn increasing attention from educators throughout the country as an alternative in the inservice education of teachers. The original small group of San Francisco educators has grown to a nationwide network of university campus writing centers. Each center is the site of a program modeled after the Bay Area Writing Project, and each develops a cadre of teacher-consultants through invitational summer institutes. The teacher-consultants are then responsible for conducting inservice programs in schools.

## Summary

Huck (7) has pointed out that teachers "need to make sense of their own teaching, to know *why* they teach as they do in order to be informed teachers. They need to question principles underlying certain practices." Understanding their own attitudes about communication and their own behaviors with respect to the children in their classrooms is a critical first step in this learning process. Viewing themselves as part of a professional community, working collaboratively with other teachers in their schools, and becoming actively involved in the work of professional educational associations are also important steps in the process.

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